

**New England Association of  
Schools and Colleges**



**Commission on Public Secondary Schools**

**Report of the Visiting Committee for  
Somerset High School**

**Somerset, Massachusetts  
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**Stephen E. Mitchell, Chair  
Paul Mangelinkx, Assistant Chair  
Robert W. Pineault, Principal**

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**New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.**  
209 Burlington Road, Bedford, MA 01730-1433

TEL 781.271.0022  
FAX 781.271.0950

[www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement on Limitations.....	4
Introduction .....	4
Overview of Findings.....	7
Discussion of Significant Findings regarding:	
Teaching and Learning.....	7
Support of Teaching and Learning.....	8
School and Community Profile.....	10
School's Statement of Mission and Learning Expectations.....	17
Teaching and Learning Standards.....	18
Mission and Expectations.....	19
Curriculum.....	24
Instruction.....	32
Assessment of Student Learning .....	39
Support of Teaching and Learning Standards.....	46
Leadership and Organization.....	47
School Resources for Learning .....	56
Community Resources for Learning .....	65
Follow-Up Responsibilities.....	74
APPENDICES	
A    Visiting Committee Directory .....	75
B    Substantive Change Policy.....	76

## STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

### The Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, located in Bedford, Massachusetts, considers this visiting committee report of Somerset High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty days (60) of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office, and the appropriate news media.

The prime concern of the visiting committee has been to assess the quality of the educational program at Somerset High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

### INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded membership and accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England region who seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of six Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS), and the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public secondary school member institutions, CPSS requires visiting committees to assess the degree to which the evaluated schools meet the qualitative Standards for Accreditation of the Commission. Those Standards are:

#### Teaching and Learning Standards

- Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of Student Learning

Support of Teaching and Learning Standards  
Leadership and Organization  
School Resources for Learning  
Community Resources for Learning

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Commission's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Commission in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

**Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study**

A steering committee of professional staff members was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Somerset High School, a committee of eight members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people.

The self-study of Somerset High School extended over a period of sixteen school months from January 2008 to June 2009. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students and a community member joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, Somerset High School also used questionnaires developed by The Global Institute at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

It is important that the reader understand that every subcommittee appointed by the steering committee was required to present its report to the entire professional staff for approval. No single report developed in the self-study became part of the official self-study documents until it had been approved by the entire professional staff.

## **The Process Used by the Visiting Committee**

A visiting committee of sixteen evaluators that included classroom teachers, principals and assistant principals, and central administrators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate the high school. The Committee members spent four days in Somerset, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Somerset High School.

The visiting team built its professional judgment on evidence collected from the following sources:

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 32 hours shadowing 16 students for a half-day
- a total of 35 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 30 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion in the report was agreed to by team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the team's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Commission Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools, which will make a decision on the accreditation of Somerset High School.

## **Overview of Findings**

Although the conclusions of the visiting committee on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation appear in various sections of this report, the committee wishes to highlight some findings in the paragraphs that follow. These findings are not intended to be a summary of the report.

The adults who inhabit this facility and the positive rapport and mutual respect there is among administrators, faculty and staff members, and students make this a positive educational community. The positive components of dedication, commitment, and pursuit of excellence drive the culture of Somerset High School.

Somerset High School has employed the self-study process as a means of examining the programs and services it provides for Somerset and Berkeley students as well as its fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning. The visiting committee found that many of the school's strengths and needs delineated in the self-study are evident in the school and that the commendations and recommendations found in this report will form the basis for continuous improvement in programs, services, and the new high school facilities provided in the future. Somerset High School is dedicated to continuous growth and improvement as evidenced by the efforts the community has made in the self-evaluation process and in the dedication of the faculty and parents to provide a rich learning environment for students.

The visiting committee commends the professional staff and administration of the Somerset High School for creating a safe and nurturing environment and clear expectations for student behavior. Students take pride in their school and expressed to the visiting committee how comfortable they feel with their teachers and their peers. The school celebrates student achievement and enjoys the support and appreciation of the school committee and the greater Somerset and Berkeley communities. The administration and faculty have involved parents and members of the community in projects and programs that foster learning and connection to the school itself. Parents express their satisfaction with the programs and services Somerset High School provides and appreciate both the leadership and the open communication of the school administration.

## **Teaching and Learning at Somerset High School**

Somerset High School faces the challenges of providing students with a comprehensive program of studies and many supportive services. The school is working diligently to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education in an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century building. It is hoped that major renovations and/or a new high school facility will provide for 21<sup>st</sup> Century student needs and reflect the ideas and goals expressed in the mission statement. The faculty, administration, and school committee have searched for creative ways to provide for the needs of all students while demonstrating fiscal responsibility to the town. Parents and community members have contributed to these efforts in many ways and on many occasions. SHS has developed a revision mission statement and expectations for

student learning to guide the school in its vision. However, at this time, the mission is not yet imbedded in the culture of the school. The current mission statement reflects longstanding practice but does not drive decisions as part of the school-wide vision for improvement. Because of the efforts of the administrators, faculty, staff, and students' families, there is a warm, supportive climate for learning at Somerset High School. Students are not as certain about how the expectations for student learning relate to the goals and objectives for their individual courses. Some work will need to be done to clarify the connections and to post exemplars of student work in each classroom for students to refer when evaluating their own work, employing the school-wide rubrics that will help them understand how they are assessed. These rubrics should be employed across the school and connected to daily lesson plans and assessments in all classes. The data derived from these classroom assessments should assist in both the curriculum review process and improvement of instruction. The school also needs to determine how individual student performance of the social and civic expectations will be tracked.

The Somerset High School Program of Studies is varied and comprehensive. The curriculum offers an abundance of learning opportunities after school and beyond the walls of the campus. The faculty has worked diligently to provide an array of courses that will prepare students for life after high school. School-wide academic rubrics need to be purposefully embedded into the curriculum, however, and technology integrated into the curriculum. Time and resources should be allocated so that teachers who teach the same course have time to collaborate to ensure that all students enrolled in various sections of the same course achieve the same goals. Faculty members should develop stronger connections between curriculum objectives and academic expectations across all departments, develop strategies to ensure an equally high degree of expectations and rigor in all courses, and develop methods to incorporate data derived from classroom assessments in the curriculum review process. The schedule provides for longer instructional periods and is seen as a benefit for many elective courses, but not all teachers are employing varied instructional approaches during the extended periods, and staff development activities should be provided to assist them in varying instruction and teaching in the block.

### **Support for Teaching and Learning at Somerset High School**

Teachers and department leaders are looking for more direction from the principal as the instructional and educational leader to develop a common, school-wide vision rather than the multitude of visions evident department by department. The principal and other administrative leaders at SHS, while passionate and dedicated keepers of school traditions and values, have an opportunity to assume the leadership to promote a coherent vision and mission to all stakeholders in the SHS educational community. As the leadership team tirelessly supports the work being done in the building, teachers and support staff members will buoy the greatest aspirations of the principal as he endeavors to carry out a vision of student excellence and academic achievement.

With the support of the entire school community, the leadership team at SHS has provided for students a safe and nurturing environment. It is a place where students feel connected with their teachers and administrators as well as each other. In this supportive environment, through an emphasis on core content areas, students are challenged to



become more responsible for themselves and for each other, to become college-ready and career-ready young men and women.

The student support services are consistent with the school's mission and expectations. Because of the recent economic downturn, there has been some adjustment to the allocation of resources, programs, and services. Evaluation of programs and personnel in the support services department is inconsistent, and there has not been a recent program review of these services. A number of teachers do not use the library media center on a regular basis to support teaching and learning so that a valuable resource is currently underutilized. Staff development programs that assist teachers in using the library media center and a strong ongoing orientation program for students should be continued to increase the use of the library media center.

Although the school committee has been highly supportive of school initiatives and student needs, budget constraints have caused the committee and the administration to make difficult decisions about how to allocate resources equitably and effectively. As enrollment grows, however, the budgetary constraints will need to be addressed on a larger more public scale in order to meet student needs.

Somerset High School should be proud of the many aspects of the school that are commended in this report. It should continue to provide those programs and services while continuing to refine and improve them. It has the capacity to address the recommendations presented. However, to fully meet the needs of the existing program at SHS and as it seeks to expand its educational offerings to a wider band of students, the school will require immediate attention to the development of a short-term transition plan to effectively move ahead as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century high school.

With strong leadership, the spirit of cooperation, and the support of the community, the school should achieve its mission and ensure that every student is well able to attain the expectations for student learning. Some programs and approaches need refinement, and the faculty needs to examine whether or not every student is being challenged with the most rigorous program, regardless of his or her ability. However, the foundation and the will are highly evident in the school. The pride the community takes in Somerset High School should serve it well as it continues to move forward guided by its mission.

## School and Community Profile

### The Community

Somerset High School is located in Somerset, Massachusetts, a full service suburban community. Somerset is 20 miles southeast of Providence, RI and 44 miles south of Boston. With a population of 17,655, the town is located on the western shore of the Taunton River and Mount Hope Bay and covers a span of 8.11 sq. miles.

Although a significant Indian population inhabited the land when colonists arrived, by the end of King Philip's war in 1677, English settlers dominated the Pocasset, members of the Wampanoag tribe. Originally part of the Indian lands of Shawomet, Somerset was settled in 1677. The earliest colonists farmed and fished, both in the river and off-shore. The town developed shipyards, mercantile and shipping businesses early in its history. The first documented local shipyard was established between 1707 and 1712 on the Lee River by Samuel Lee. Early in Somerset's history, the dominant religious group was the Quakers, who established a meeting house in 1701, one of the few and earliest Quaker churches in southeastern Massachusetts.

Incorporated in 1790, from a section of Swansea, Somerset has a rich and colorful heritage dating back to colonial days. The name of the town was chosen by a prominent 18<sup>th</sup> century resident, Jerathmel Bowers, as a compliment to his wife born Mary Sherburne of Somerset Square, Boston. Some believe that Bowers wished to name the town Sherburne in her honor; however, there was already a town in Massachusetts with said name.

After the War of 1812, Somerset became one of the chief distribution points in New England for foreign goods with trade to China, the West Indies, Europe, and the Atlantic coast. By 1847, 138 vessels were built and registered in the town with many engaged in the coastal trade. The most important shipyard was that of James M. Hood, whose yard launched several important clipper ships. This industry boomed after the Mexican War and the California Gold Rush, and spawned shipping related activities such as a ropewalk and the Somerset Iron Works. Aside from shipping related businesses, the largest early industry in Somerset was the making of stoneware. When steam began destroying the shipbuilding industry, the anchor works company was taken over by Job Leonard who proceeded to develop a nail works company. By 1865, nail production was the largest industry in town. Through this industrial growth, south Somerset remained largely agricultural. The opening of the Somerset and Dighton Railroad led to the establishment in the town of the Old Colony's major coal port in 1872, while an enterprising former potter created a cannery operation in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, as the industrial development of Fall River absorbed Somerset's industry, the community turned increasingly from shipping, to iron manufacturing, to suburban services. The dominant industry in Somerset since the First World War has been power generation due to the construction of the Montaup Electric Company plant in 1923 and Brayton Point in 1963. The dominant character of Somerset has been

residential since the bankruptcy of Fall River during the Depression that brought a flood of middle-class residents into the town. Unlike most communities in the area, Somerset increased its population by 74% during the Depression.

Today, Somerset is a residential suburb of Fall River, Massachusetts governed by three elected members of the Board of Selectmen, a town administrator, and the traditional New England open town meetings. This waterfront community of less than 18,000 residents offers a favorable tax rate, with a superior school system and programs that presently meet the needs of the town's population.

Somerset's surrounding communities include the city of Fall River and the towns of Swansea and Dighton. The town of Berkley rests northeast of Somerset, to the east of Dighton and north of Freetown. Somerset is the home of businesses of all sizes. The town's commercial and industrial tax base has grown considerably in past years, and is projected to continue to increase given the town's convenient location, access to major highways, educated workforce, and aggressive approach of attracting new businesses.

Somerset has a population of approximately 17,655 with a labor force of 9,728. The town's unemployment rate is 8.4%. The income per capita, which includes both adults and children, is \$26,644.00, and the median household income is \$65,337.00. Four percent of families who live in Somerset have incomes below the poverty level. In addition, 1.2% of its residents possess income levels below 50% of the poverty level.

Somerset offers a range of governmental services. Such services include K-12 public education, police and fire defense, emergency medical services, collection and treatment of sewage, water distribution, public works, veteran's services, council on aging, health and sanitation, and library services. Approximately 59% of the local property tax resources are allocated to support public education. This includes the cost of the two regional schools, Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School and Bristol County Agricultural High School. However, the cost of health care, accrued debt, and other indirect costs related to education comes directly from the town's budget.

During past years, Somerset has maintained an "excellent" bond rating of AA3, resulting in large part from long range planning tools – such as implementing a capital improvement program, sustaining reserve balances despite tight budgets, investing in technology upgrades, and maintaining an aggressive pay-as-you-go financing strategy for capital improvements.

The ethnic composition of Somerset is gradually becoming more diversified; however, 98% of the population remains Caucasian and 1.8% of the residence are African American, Indian, Eskimo, and Asian.

The total student population of the Somerset Public Schools is 2,841, which comprises approximately 0.3% of the state total. The Somerset School District consists of one high school (Somerset High School), one middle school (Somerset Middle School), and four elementary schools (North Elementary, South Elementary, Wilbur

Elementary, and Chace Street Elementary). Somerset Public Schools employs 225 teachers, educates 1,413 male and 1428 female students, and touts a ratio of 11 to 1 teacher/student ratio. Approximately 2,738 students are of white ethnicity, while the other remaining students are African American, American Indian, Asian, or Hispanic.

Most notably, 25% of SHS's students live in the town of Berkley, Massachusetts. For more than 30 years, high school-aged students from Somerset and Berkley meld together at SHS to form a cohesive student body guided by the mission and expectations for student learning. Students of Berkley and of Somerset work collaboratively and have equal access to receive full benefit from the program of studies and extra-curricular opportunities.

The Town of Berkley, Massachusetts is a rural community that has managed to preserve much of its 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape. The town covers 16 square miles of the state's southeastern region and neighbors Dighton to the west, Taunton to the north, Lakeville to the east, and Freetown to the South. The town is located just 12 miles north of Fall River. Berkley is cherished by its residents for its deep sense of tranquility and reminders of its past, among which is the Berkley-Dighton bridge, perhaps the oldest swing span bridge in Massachusetts.

Berkley has a population of approximately 6,433 with a labor force of 3,800. The town's unemployment rate is 5.2%. The income per capita, which includes both adults and children, is 22,420, and the median household income is \$83,669.00. About 3.2% of families and 4.0% of the population live below the poverty line, including 1.8% under the age of 18 and 8.7% age 65 and older.

The Town of Berkley offers a range of governmental services that include police and fire protection, emergency medical services, collection and treatment of sewage, water distribution, public works, streets, parks and recreation, veteran's services, council on aging, health and sanitation, library services, and a K-8 public education program. Although the majority of high school-age children attend Somerset High School, some Berkley residence send their children to Bristol County Agricultural High School in Dighton, Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School in Taunton, or local private schools such as Coyle and Cassidy High School in Taunton.

The ethnic composition of Berkley residents consists mainly of European ancestry such as English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Irish. As Somerset, Berkley is primarily a Caucasian community making up over 96% of the population. About 4.4% of the town's population are of other ethnicities, whether it be Hispanic or American Indian.

The Berkley School District educates more than 964 students. This rural district consists of two schools: Berkley Community School and Berkley Middle School. Over 96% of students educated by Berkley Public Schools are Caucasian, and 4% of the students are African American, Asian, and Hispanic. Berkley employs 70 teachers. Of the 964 students, 51% are male and 48.6% are female. The district has a student/teacher ratio of 17 to 1.

During the 2008 fiscal year, the Town of Berkley touted a bond rating of A3. The excellent bond rating of both Somerset and Berkley serve to support the costs of educating the children of both communities to be life-long, 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

### **The School and the Students**

Somerset High School enrolls students from grades 9-12 with a total enrollment of 996 students, 482 males and 514 females. Two-hundred and thirty three (233) students reside in Berkley, comprising 23.3% of the whole student population. The ethnic, racial and cultural composition has remained constant with 0.7% African- American students, 0.9% Asian students, 0.6% Hispanic, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1.9% Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic during the 2008-2009 school year.

SHS employs 89 teachers; in fact, the school community boasts that a teacher to student ratio of 11.2 to 1 provides for personalized instruction for all students. Individual teachers have an average class size of 22 students. Despite the desire to provide for teacher collaboration, currently teachers lack formalized and scheduled time to facilitate collaboration in and among academic departments. The high school provides 5.7 hours per day for instructional time. The master schedule consists of 8 periods that meet for 6 – 57- minute periods per day through 8 days. Each period drops 2 days during the 8-day cycle. The academic calendar cites 181 days for teacher/student contact for a total of 1032 hours of instructional time per year.

SHS offers students the opportunity to elect courses from Advance Placement, honors, college preparatory and general preparatory, ranging from level 9 to level 3. The master schedule supports Advanced Placement courses offered in biology, calculus, chemistry, English, physics, psychology, studio art, U.S. history, world history, composition and language, and literature and language. In addition, courses with an honors distinction are offered in art, business, technology, engineering/technology, English, foreign languages, mathematics, music, sciences, and social studies. College Preparatory (level 2) courses are offered to students in all grades. Many factors articulated in the program of studies describe the subtle differences among courses based on levels and academic departments. General Preparatory (level 3) courses are offered to students in all grades. Students enrolled in general preparatory courses are prepared to enroll in community colleges and technical institutes of higher education. SHS offers general preparatory courses to serve students who require more individualized approaches and an instructional pace consistent with each learner's needs. In general, students participating in the general preparatory program transition from high school to enroll in the military, enroll in 2-year community or private colleges, enroll in technical schools, or enter the workforce. Guidance counselors calculate class rank based on 2 variables – academic level and grades, which is a weighted model in computing grade point average.

In order for a student to graduate, he/she must earn 144 credits throughout four years of study. Any course meeting 6 or more periods during the 8-day cycle is

considered a full-time course. Likewise, courses that meet fewer than 6 periods are part-time courses. Subjects meeting less than 6 days per 8-day cycle earn 1 credit per class meeting. Students must earn a grade of higher than 64 to receive credit for any course.

Unique to schools of comparable size, SHS offers 11 Advanced Placement courses and an abundance of elective courses that provide students the opportunity to explore potential areas for future careers or study. Moreover, students have support programs available during and after school such as peer tutoring available every period and homework club that meets each day in the Media Center. Students may enroll into the School-to-Work program, designed for students to earn credits for work-related experience. Articulation agreements exist with Bristol Community College, Johnson & Wales University, and New England Institute of Technology. SHS is also a member of the Virtual High School Global Consortium (VHS). Students may enroll in Internet-based VHS courses to augment their academic schedule.

The SHS offers variety of co-curricular activities such as 22 athletic programs, a variety of intramural sports programs, and 14 Music/Performing Arts programs. Students may participate in 30 clubs and/or groups, ranging from student council, to the Gay and Straight Alliance, to the Key Club. A majority of students participate in at least one school-based activity; in fact, many students participate in multiple sports and/or activities.

Based on the class of 2008 with a class size of 233 students, 64% of the graduates were accepted to four-year degree granting institutions and 30% were accepted to certificate and two-year degree granting institutions. Somerset High School graduates have gone on to study at such colleges and universities as Harvard University, Cornell University, Brown University, University of Southern California, University of Florida, University of Connecticut, Boston University, Boston College, as well as the University of Massachusetts Amherst, etc.

SHS is proud to recognize many academic and non-academic student achievements through a variety of means. Throughout the year, students obtaining honor roll status receive written recognition issued by the principal and assistant principals. Each spring, students receive an array of academic and non-academic awards at the Student Recognition Assembly. In addition, students receive multiple opportunities to be recognized for their accomplishments through programs as the National Honor Society, Sport Banquets, Music Assemblies, and Student of the Month recognition.

The Somerset Community Evening School is an alternative high school diploma program that provides a unique opportunity for students who are unable to complete their high school studies in a traditional setting. The Evening School has a year-round schedule with diverse academic offerings. All students fulfill state exam requirements, specifically MCAS tests, in addition to completing a community service project. The Evening School offers a rigorous program of study geared toward meeting the unique needs of the "at risk" student population. The Evening School holds its own graduation ceremony with many of its graduates going on to further their education.

Perhaps the most important issue facing the Somerset community is the current structural integrity of the facility, including the track, the football field, and stands. The poor condition of the high school facility was cited in several recommendations in the 2000 NEASC report. However, all building related problems are currently being addressed by the Somerset School Department. Central office administrators applied to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in 2007 to be put on a list of communities for reimbursement for a new high school. The Town of Berkley made the same request for a new high school. Both requests were denied in 2007. The Massachusetts School Building Authority directed Somerset and Berkley to investigate regionalizing Somerset High School. The two school districts have hosted several discussion forums since 2007. Presently, a regional planning board, with representation from both towns, has been charged with investigating and evaluating the formation of a 9-12 regionalized high school. During May 2010, the regional planning board shall present their finding to the leadership of Berkley and Somerset.

During February 2008, a portion of SHS was closed due to deterioration of columns supporting the southeast wing. In 2009, additional space in the same section of the building was closed as well.

At the May 2009 Town Meeting, the residents of Somerset voted to allocate \$750,000.00 for emergency repairs to that section of the building. Residents at the Town Meeting also voted to create a committee to study the issue of regionalization, which was the first formal step in the regionalization process as required by law.

According to the Massachusetts School Building Authority, the construction of a new high school or the renovation of SHS is directly related to regionalization of Berkley and Somerset's 9-12 educational programs.

### **School Improvement Planning**

School improvement and student performance are measured in a variety of ways at SHS. The *School Improvement Plan* sets annual goals that are updated each year. The mission statement and expectations for student learning drive the goals articulated in the improvement plan. Annually, the SHS *Advisory Council* monitors the progress of the improvement goals. Goals set for the 2009-2010 school year include preparing for the NEASC self-study, improving MCAS and AP scores, reviewing school services and enhancing technology as a teaching tool.

Student performance on MCAS targets both content and individual students. Data analysis makes it possible to isolate the content areas of concern as well as specific students needing additional support. Content areas needing improvement in ELA are addressed within English classes, as well as in all disciplines with reading and writing across the curriculum initiatives. Any student struggling to meet the MCAS graduation

requirement receives focused tutorial assistance in Math and ELA during the school day and after school through MCAS tutoring sessions.

SHS monitors student progress and proficiency of school-wide expectations as stated in the Mission Statement. These expectations are the school standards that define what students should know and be able to do. In the future, SHS's instructional leaders plan to launch a comprehensive process of assessing school-wide expectations using school-wide rubrics and using a reporting method unique to the needs of the SHS community.

Revisions in SHS's mission statement occurred in the summer of 2008 included language changes which reflected the present faculty's core values concerning education. In addition, amendments were made with two of the school-wide expectations in order to free them from discipline-specific language and make them truly school-wide.

To prepare for the visiting committee, SHS has identified the following as challenges facing our school community:

- the present physical condition and age of the school building.
- technology limitations
- school-system budget issues (local & state) that don't allow for growth of programs and staffing.
- formal opportunities for faculty to meet within and among departments for professional learning, sharing, and collaboration.
- regionalization issues.



## **SOMERSET HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

Somerset High School, in a partnership with parents and the community, maintains high expectations for academic achievement for a student body with a diverse range of abilities and interests. In a student-focused environment, our school provides opportunities for all students to achieve their full potential and become lifelong learners. We provide a safe and secure environment that addresses students' emotional, physical, and social needs. Somerset High School prepares students to become socially responsible citizens and active participants in their community.

### **ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS**

Students at Somerset High School will:

1. come to school prepared and ready to learn.
2. develop and employ effective study skills.
3. read, write, and communicate effectively.
  - read widely and critically for a variety of purposes
  - write clearly, concisely, and persuasively
  - communicate ideas and information effectively in an oral presentation
4. self-evaluate and reflect on their learning using a variety of methods.
5. explore, develop, and express their creativity.
6. solve problems by reasoning critically and creatively.
7. assimilate, analyze, interpret, and evaluate information critically to become capable researchers.
8. demonstrate technological literacy as a tool for learning, research, and communication.

### **SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS**

Students at Somerset High School will:

1. demonstrate pride and respect for themselves and others.
2. accept responsibility for their behavior and actions as outlined by the student/parent handbook.

### **CIVIC EXPECTATIONS**

Students at Somerset High School will:

1. comprehend and fulfill the requirements of good citizenship while developing a sense of their personal and community responsibility.
2. contribute responsibility to endeavors beyond the classroom through independent ventures and/or school sponsored activities.

# **TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

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**MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

**CURRICULUM**

**INSTRUCTION**

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

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## TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

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# 1

## MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

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The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of learners is seeking to achieve. The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school's mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Every component of the school community must focus on enabling all students to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

1. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.
3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:
  - are measurable;
  - reflect the school's mission.

4. For each academic expectation in the mission, the school shall have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.
5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide social and civic expectations.
6. The mission statement and the school's expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.
7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.

## Conclusions:

The Somerset High School Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning were originally developed and approved by the school community in 1999. During the summer of 2008, a committee comprised of an administrator, faculty members, students, a community member, a school committee member, and a school adjustment counselor surveyed faculty and staff members and the community to collect data that would be used to revise the existing mission statement and expectations for student learning. After analyzing this data, the committee presented a revised mission and expectations document to the faculty. The draft document was discussed and reviewed over several faculty meetings. Parents recall being represented on the committee. Following a second round of revisions, the final draft was approved by the faculty in December 2008. The school committee and school advisory council approved the revised document in January 2009. Although the revision of the mission statement received considerable input into its revision from the general faculty, the limited representation of parents and additional community members illustrates the difficulty Somerset experiences in eliciting parent and community members' support or participation in decision-making. The limited participation in the development of the mission and expectations prevented these constituency groups from having a critical and meaningful voice in a dialogue about school reform issues that affect the future and direction of Somerset High School. *(self-study, parents, teachers, school committee)*

The mission and expectations for student learning appear to represent the fundamental values and beliefs of the school community. In a culture of pride and respect, students, parents, and teachers believe in high expectations for all students within a safe and supportive learning environment. The academic expectations place emphasis on preparedness. Students report that they feel prepared for learning beyond Somerset High School. Parents report that preparedness is essential to life beyond high school, and administrators assert that the mission absolutely reflects the beliefs of the school community. As determined by the Endicott Study, 90% of staff and 75% of parents feel the mission statement accurately reflects their beliefs about student learning. However, in practice, the school community has failed to embrace fully the mission statement as the driving force within the culture of the school, making it less clear that the mission represents the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning. *(students, staff, Endicott Study, parents, school leadership team, observations)*

The school has defined social and civic expectations but has yet to define formally how they are to be measured. Academic expectations that are reflective of the school's mission statement have also been established. Rubrics for each academic expectation have been drafted to clarify what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate. However, the rubrics have yet to be formally adopted or fully utilized by the faculty to measure student achievement of the academic expectations. Additionally, there are concerns regarding the rigor and relevance of some of the academic expectations. The disparity among them makes it difficult to determine

whether all of the academic expectations actually reflect high standards and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, but the school community expects students to achieve these academic expectations by the time they leave Somerset High School. Extending that practice to the civic and social learning expectations through the use of school indicators will benefit the school community by clarifying and measuring the degree to which the school as a community of learners exhibits the desired behavioral characteristics. (*self-study, teachers, school leadership team, students*)

The school is in the process of developing targeted levels of successful achievement for each academic expectation. In the summer of 2009, eight faculty members worked to revise existing rubrics to align with the current mission statement and academic expectations. On the first day of the 2009-2010 school year, teachers were given draft copies of rubrics for each academic expectation designated in the mission and were asked to implement them. Faculty members were advised that training in the use of school-wide rubrics would follow. Since that time, however, there has been no discussion, training, or directive in the use of these rubrics. Sixty-four percent of teachers reports use of school-wide rubrics, but they report utilizing modified versions of the rubrics to suit course content. Further inconsistencies exist within the rubrics themselves. Seven of the eight designated rubrics indicate five levels of achievement, which include a zero rating to designate lack of performance. Non-performance is not consistent with the high expectations stated in the school's mission. The school-wide writing rubric is the most widely accepted rubric, and it designates six levels of achievement. Currently, rubrics are not consistently measuring school-wide academic expectations. Additionally, an acceptable set of rubrics has not been adopted within the school community. Moreover, the culture of teaching and learning throughout the entire school is not based upon nor imbued with the principles of the mission and expectations. While student achievement may be observable in the life of the school, the mission document in its present form cannot guide procedures, policies, decision-making, curriculum, instructional, and assessment revisions. Therefore, until the mission, expectations, and rubrics are clear to all and used by all, Somerset High School is not able to fully live out its mission (*Endicott Study, teachers, school leadership team, steering committee*)

The school has social and civic expectations that reflect its culture but has yet to adopt a formal measurement for them. The process by which the school will assess progress toward achievement of the social and civic expectations is in a developmental phase. There are indicators by which the school will gather data to assess its progress in achieving social and civic expectations. The school will track student involvement in co-curricular activities and athletics, student attendance, and student discipline referrals. Furthermore, the superintendent and school committee have endorsed the implementation of a community service graduation requirement to begin with the class of 2014 during the 2010-11 school year, but assessment of the community service project has yet to be determined. As a formal process of assessment is still in its developmental phase, the school is not yet able to report to students and to the community progress made toward

achievement of the social and civic expectations. (*school leadership team, self-study, teachers*)

As presently written, the school's mission documents provide no consistent means to assess the students' achievement of the school's own expectations for student learning. These expectations have yet to be finalized and specific levels of performance with a designated level of successful accomplishment for each expectation selected to guide students in self-assessment and self-correction in the learning process is yet to be determined. Without a set of performance standards for each clearly articulated learning expectation and specific rubrics to guide both teachers and students in the assessment, it is not possible for the school to assess student progress in achieving those expectations. While SHS has established academic, civic, and social expectations that are consistent with the mission statement and address skills and competencies identified by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAS) and district goals, they do not address the learning needs of all students. At present, there are no assurances that all graduates of SHS are given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, competencies, concepts, and understandings identified in these expectations. When all students understand the concepts in the mission and are aware in daily learning activities of how the mission relates to what they are doing and learning, when they understand and are assessed using the rubrics designed to assess achievement of expectations, and when the data from this assessment is used to improve curriculum and instruction, this process will be complete. It may be necessary for the school to provide professional development for all faculty members on the creation and use of effective rubrics so that teachers and students can be comfortable with this system of assessment that provides so much formative assistance for the process of learning. (*self-study, teachers, observations, panel presentation, standards committee*)

The Somerset High School mission statement and expectations for student learning was originally developed in 1999 and was formally reviewed in 2008 once since then. The school has yet to define how or when it will formally review the mission. The assignment of responsibility and procedures for regularly reviewing the mission statement and expectations for student learning have not yet been established in order to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, and state and national standards. Although there are informal plans to review the mission and expectations for student learning, the nature of this review has not been elaborated. While committees such as the school advisory committee (SAC) and the principal advisory committee (PAC) meet regularly to discuss current and future program that have a positive effect on student learning and are in line with the school's mission statement, the school needs to establish the procedures that will be used on an annual basis to evaluate the success of the school in meeting each of its stated expectations for student learning. When a plan of review is developed, student and parent input must be actively sought, and specific data from measurement of student achievement must be collected and analyzed to serve as a basis for assessment of the mission and expectations as necessary to serve a variety of changing needs. (*school leadership team, teachers, steering committee, self-study, parents, students*)

**Commendations:**

1. The creation of community service learning as a requirement for graduation
2. The adoption of the 6 Traits Writing Rubric
3. The emphasis on a culture of pride and respect

**Recommendations:**

1. Evaluate and revise the academic expectations to ensure they reflect the fundamental values and beliefs of the entire school community
2. Clarify for all members of the school community how the school's mission and expectations for student learning are connected to teaching and learning and how they inform the decision-making process at Somerset High School
3. Implement targeted levels for successful achievement of the expectations for student learning as outlined in the school-wide rubrics
4. Establish indicators with a targeted level of success by which students will achieve the social and civic expectations
5. Ensure that the mission and expectations are used to guide procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and are evident in the culture of the school
6. Ensure that the mission statement and expectations for student learning represent the fundamental values and beliefs of the community through an ongoing revision and rewriting process that includes students, parents, and the school community
7. Develop and implement indicators by which the school assesses school-wide progress in achieving identified civic and social expectations for student learning

## TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

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# 2

## CURRICULUM

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The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school's beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon the professional staff's commitment to and involvement in a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.
2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.
3. The written curriculum shall:
  - prescribe content;
  - integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;
  - identify course-specific learning goals;
  - suggest instructional strategies;
  - suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.
4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall:
  - be appropriately integrated;
  - emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.
7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.
11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.



## Conclusions:

Using the revised mission statement and increased awareness of the school-wide expectations has allowed the teachers at Somerset to begin the process of aligning the curriculum with the academic expectations. Currently, the content areas reference the expectations only sporadically. The mission statement is posted in the classrooms along with the expectations for student learning; however, most of the learning community, students, and parents, are not familiar with the expectations. Despite the recent efforts to make the expectations for student learning an essential part of the curriculum, students and parents are not aware of how the curriculum connects to the academic expectations. Clear written curriculum documents that include this connection with the academic expectations will inform both students and parents of the importance of the academic expectations as underlying or formative principles for the curricula. (*students, parents, student shadowing*)

Somerset High School provides a varied curriculum with a wide variety of core and elective courses. There are several levels and enough elective courses available in every department for all types of student learners. The written curriculum at Somerset High School clearly prescribes content and state specific learning goals in all subject areas. In addition, the curriculum, with few exceptions, recommends a variety of instructional strategies and assessment techniques. Virtual High School (VHS) is available to students looking for a course not offered at Somerset. Some curriculum areas are aligned with the school's mission and school-wide expectations, and all curriculum guides are linked to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Overall, students at Somerset have a wide-variety of courses and opportunities through their four years. In addition, there is some opportunity to practice and achieve the school-wide expectations and/or the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and to be assessed through either the school rubrics or the rubrics of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, but these opportunities seem to depend on individual departments and teachers rather than being mandated and certain throughout the school. In addition, some students in every department do not see or do not use the school-wide rubrics on a consistent basis. However, while there is an absence of consistently high expectations across all departments and at all levels of curriculum use in curricula of all levels, departments are in the process of ensuring that the strategies of personalization and challenge are consistent for all students. Student academic support systems and assistance for all students are available who want or need help. Even though it is not clear from curriculum documents that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve the expectations, there is a plan in place to institute a process whereby faculty members will analyze data collected by the school-wide rubrics and recommend changes for what and how courses are taught. Immediate implementation of this plan will document the current beliefs of faculty members and inform the learning community of both the mission and academic expectations, and establish them as central to the development and revision of curriculum. Freedom to be creative or excellent must be there for all teachers, but the written and taught curriculum must offer equal opportunities for all students to succeed. (*self-study, teachers, students, department leaders*)

The written curriculum specifies the content to be taught in each discipline. The majority of guides suggest course-specific learning goals, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques. The academic departments say they assume that the learning expectations are embedded in each content area, but these are not, in fact, clearly articulated. Teachers and content coordinators point out that there are common assessments and content rubrics in many of the curricula and that the assessments are implemented consistently. The majority of departments, however, has not yet integrated identified academic expectations within the curriculum's content and skill lists or in common assessments. Until the recently adopted curriculum review and revision process, there was no formalized structural curriculum revision process whereby departmental review is considered on a regularly scheduled rotating cycle that is focused, formalized, and systematic. Teachers tended to develop their own specific course curriculum guides, which were not always aligned with overall departmental curricula. When instructional strategies and assessment techniques are based on the school-wide expectations and their aligned rubrics, all students can expect a consistent set of expectations and consistent opportunity and assessment. Therefore, the school must adopt a complete curricular framework or format that includes content, integrates relevant school-wide learning expectations, includes course-specific learning goals, suggests instructional strategies, and suggests assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics. The use of school-wide rubrics is limited. Departments have initiated content rubrics but have found the school-wide rubrics are not specific enough to adequately address their individual curriculum needs. Even with the weakness in integrating school-wide learning expectations and school-wide rubrics, however, the written curriculum is clear, current, and available for teachers to access and implement. Within the established format, identifying essential questions that are linked to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the school-wide academic expectations and developing authentic assessments that employ school-wide rubrics will also assist students to gain a deeper understanding of course content and expectations. (*self-study, teachers, department leaders*)

Somerset has a weighted grading system with four levels in its curriculum: advanced placement (Level 9), honors (Level 1), college preparatory (Level 2) and general prep (Level 3). The curriculum attempts to engage students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as offering many varied opportunities for authentic learning and alternative and common assessments. As the school's curriculum revision plan is implemented, there must be more explicit identification of where and when these higher-order learning skills will be integrated in all curricula to ensure that all students can benefit from these opportunities. Examples of higher order thinking, inquiry, and authentic application as well as common learning experiences and assessments encourage all students to engage in higher order thinking. Such experiences include research papers in English, allowing students to connect to individual interests and encouraging students to utilize their research skills beyond the English classroom. Students have the opportunity for practical experiments in chemistry and physics as well as authentic applications in business technology, engineering technology, robotics, and the fine arts, including pottery, jewelry making, choral music, and band. Art shows, including the 'Trashion Show,' display creativity. Such connections between the

classroom and the “real world” increase the relevance of what is learned and, thus, of student motivation to learn. When explicit curricular emphasis on inquiry, problem-solving, higher order thinking, authentic learning, and alternative assessments are made available to all students in all courses, the school will ensure adequate student preparation for the next phases of their lives. (*curriculum guides, teachers, department leaders, student work*)

Most teachers are primarily concerned with focusing on their departmental expectations for student learning. Cross-curriculum teaching and activities are not formally integrated at Somerset, but there are frequent informal interdisciplinary activities initiated by individual teachers. Sixty-seven percent of students agrees that teachers include topics from other subject areas. There are areas where the depth of understanding is lacking with the exception of the upper level and AP courses, however. The AP and Level 1 curriculum, along with smaller Level 2 and 3 classes and some elective classes, showed challenging essential questions, inquiry-based lessons, and discovery-based projects. In some Level 2 and 3 curricula in major subject areas, however, many students are not challenged to meet higher expectations that include higher-order thinking, problem-solving, cross-disciplinary learning, and alternative assessments. Too often, however, the content of the curriculum documents and the curriculum that is taught is mostly factual and focused on student recall rather than analysis, synthesis, or application. Many of the current curricular evaluations are multiple-choice, true-false, and short answer forms of tests that require only recall. In general, students in level 3 classes and even in many level 2 classes are not being challenged to meet higher expectations that include higher order thinking, problem-solving, cross-disciplinary learning, and alternative assessments. Because of these limitations, students are unable to attain their full potential suggested in the mission statement or complete the school’s academic expectations. Thus, the school’s mission goal to provide opportunities for all students to achieve their full potential and become lifelong learners is not being met in the curriculum. (*curriculum guides, students, teachers, student work*)

Somerset High School provides a variety of opportunities for students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings. Students can participate in on-line learning with Virtual High School (VHS), MCAS tutoring, DECA and Model UN competitions. The ‘Flex’ program, which provides credit recovery for medically needy and other students and the Somerset Evening School provide opportunities for alternative educational courses and/or a diploma program. There is a wide variety of clubs and activities for students to pursue their interests and to further their learning. There are over 21 different sports offered, including many junior varsity and freshman sports, many clubs and activities, including student newspaper, debate team, Gay Straight Alliance, and a very active music program – choral, marching band, jazz band, show choir, and musical theatre. These experiences provide a range of meaningful, self-directed learning opportunities for a large number of students. (*program of studies, self-study, teachers, students*)

With the new, system-wide emphasis on curriculum development and common assessments, increased attention is being paid to curriculum coordination. A full-time curriculum director works closely with high school content coordinators as well as the middle school principal to establish curriculum coordination within the schools and with the Somerset Middle School. However, MCAS results are the focus among departments, and curriculum development takes place mainly within departments. Teachers and department leaders report a lack of common planning time, the geographic separation of departments in the building, and limited professional development in cross-curricular initiatives as sharing responsibility for this disconnect. The curriculum director spends considerable time at the middle and high school, but there is little curricular coordination between or among the academic areas within the high school. Although students and teachers report there is some articulation between academic areas, only 38.3% of the parents cite that interdisciplinary learning is common. Both Somerset Middle School and Berkeley Middle School are engaged in an effort to align their curriculum with the high school and to ensure there is ongoing curriculum articulation with the high school through the efforts of the curriculum leaders and the curriculum director. Berkeley administers Algebra I readiness test and a reading test in grade 8 to assure proper placement at Somerset High School. Somerset Middle School also administers a math diagnostic test and supplies anecdotal information to the high school guidance department. The high school offers a 'Big Buddy' orientation program using high school students to help orient the middle school students to the high school as well as a 'step-up day' over the summer. The curriculum at Somerset Middle School is aligned with the high school curriculum. While there is some curriculum articulation and alignment between the high school and sending middle schools, vertical curriculum teams are not used in most curricular areas to facilitate the development of an articulated curriculum sequence throughout the school system. Students will benefit by making interdisciplinary connections and by following a well-planned sequence of learning from year-to-year. Although ensuring the implementation of the school's academic expectations as the keystone of curriculum development would greatly increase cross-curricular connections for students, care must be taken to ensure that all these initiatives be planned in such a way that there are time and resources available to ensure that teachers are not overwhelmed. (*teachers, department leaders, school leadership team, central office leadership team*)

Staffing levels, instructional materials, and the resources of the library are sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum. Staffing levels are sufficient to offer a variety of levels and courses throughout the curriculum, including 10 advanced placement courses, and faculty members state that the overall class size of 22:1 is reasonable. Moreover, the library, technology labs, and VHS and overall library use is easily accessed many teachers and students. The librarian and content coordinators refer to an adequate budget for instructional materials within their departments. However, staff members, administrators, board members, teachers, and students recognize that the available technology and facilities are inadequate to support integration of technology to improve curriculum. A study has been prepared to explore, utilize, and train faculty members in the use of new technology and software programs, which would greatly enhance the delivery of the curriculum to the students. Teachers are also concerned that

their classrooms do not have teacher computers, new projection systems, hardware, and programs. A lack of access and availability of computer technology within classrooms and the lack of training in available technologies and software programs hinder teacher use of all available technology and student learning. (*teachers, students, department leaders, survey*)

The professional staff is actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. Teachers analyze the MCAS scores using Test Wiz to help to revise curriculum and to inform instruction; guidance personnel and department leaders use this data for student placement purposes. Until a full-time curriculum director was provided, the school did not follow an explicit curriculum review cycle. However, without the use of school's academic expectations and the aligned rubrics, there has been no effective assessment of student work to assist in the curriculum revision process. With most of the curriculum based on what the individual teacher thought was important, there was also a lack of consistency in learning expectations across courses, departments, and the entire school. Even now, however, with the curriculum evaluation and revision process focused within departments, teachers and students are focusing their efforts mainly on departmental content and developing common assessments within departments. The lack of formalized inter-departmental opportunities to discuss varied instructional and assessment strategies or to look at and discuss student work limits professional growth and hinders improved student learning. (*self-study, teachers, department leaders, central office leadership team*)

Newly developed curriculum documents address school expectations and national and state standards and identify enduring understandings, essential questions, expected knowledge and skills, and alternative assessments. But with no data from assessment of student achievement of the school's academic expectations yet collected and analyzed, student performance cannot be used in making curricular decisions except as is done with externally derived data such as the MCAS. A curriculum revision process that is based on student assessment results is better able to address student needs and to enable students to achieve the school's academic expectations. (*teachers, department leaders, school leadership team, self-study*)

The Somerset School District has shown a commitment of sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum as demonstrated by the employment of a full-time curriculum director. There are resources for professional development experiences outside the school, and teachers report they are rarely denied the opportunity to engage in professional development outside of the district. The curriculum director has worked with content coordinators, teachers, and administrators to ensure an updated and workable curriculum. Because of the investment of time in curriculum development, the teachers have shown commitment in their instruction. Teachers engage students in instruction because of their ownership of the curriculum. Sixty-one percent of teachers states that they are given sufficient time to develop, evaluate, and revise curriculum. Teachers also report that some review, development, and assessment of the curriculum takes place throughout the summer. While there has been considerable progress on the development of common assessments

within departments, much work needs to be done to build a curriculum in all areas of the educational program that will insure that all students are challenged to achieve and be assessed on the school's academic expectations. (*teachers, department leaders, self-study*)

The professional development activities for the past several years support the development and implementation of a more consistent, aligned, and challenging curriculum for all students. Most departments worked on common assessment rubrics, curriculum mapping, scope and sequence, and common final exams. As well, the English department consulted with the East Bay Educational Collaborative to develop sophisticated student writing techniques. Content expectations have been identified for the curriculum although expectations for student learning are neither widely used nor assessed consistently across departments through the school. How they are to be made real, actually brought into the classroom through lesson design and implementation and used to improve and assess student learning has not been clearly determined. The progress on this work varies from department to department, but the professional development time has helped support this effort. When all teachers focus on ensuring that the school's academic expectations become real learning goals for all students and use the aligned rubrics to support and assess student learning, curriculum development will have achieved a major step in ensuring improved learning for all students. (*department leaders, teachers, school leadership team*)

#### **Commendations:**

1. Opportunities for authentic learning in areas such as art, business technology, engineering technology, music, science, and world languages
2. The informal creation of common planning time by teachers during the day and after school to discuss curriculum, lesson plans, and assessments with their colleagues
3. Variety of opportunities for students to extend learning beyond normal course offerings

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a formal curriculum development process and cycle that recognizes the school's academic expectations as the keystone to effective curriculum development
2. Develop and implement a plan to ensure that the school's academic expectations and their aligned rubrics become an integral component of all course curricula

3. Provide time and support for teachers and departments to explore and develop opportunity for cross-disciplinary learning
4. Ensure that the curricular plan and course requirements provide all students with sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each academic learning expectation in the mission
5. Investigate and use additional diagnostic measures to analyze specific student data for use in updating the curriculum
6. Demonstrate that the curricula for all levels of classes have high expectations and challenge all students with higher order thinking, problem-solving, relevant learning activities, and authentic and alternative assessments
7. Continue the deployment of up-to-date technology throughout the building and provide the necessary training for its effective integration into the teaching learning process to support the curriculum

## TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

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### 3

#### INSTRUCTION

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The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning, the achievement of expectations for student learning, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of student progress. Instructional practices must be grounded in the school's mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall:
  - personalize instruction;
  - make connections across disciplines;
  - engage students as active learners;
  - engage students as self-directed learners;
  - involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;
  - provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;
  - promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.
3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.
5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.
7. The school's professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.
8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.



## Conclusions:

With the mission statement and expectations for student learning being recently revised and adopted, Somerset High School teachers are yet to be consistently guided by this document for the planning and implementation of instructional strategies. Sixty-four percent of the staff reports that the school's mission statement influences their repertoire of teaching methods. Teachers are aware of the mission and the learning expectations, and most classes contain posters of the mission statement and the learning expectations that each department has accepted as a focus of their instruction. Some learning expectations resonate strongly with all faculty members. The expectation of student preparedness and readiness to learn is clearly expressed in the beliefs and classroom instruction of teachers. Similarly, there is strong evidence the school's philosophy and instructional strategies support student's exploration, development, and expression of creativity. However, the conscious and deliberate use of the rubrics associated with the school's learning expectations to guide instructional strategies is sporadic. Although the English language arts (ELA) and social studies departments have demonstrated more frequent use of the common six traits plus one writing rubric, the use of these learning expectation rubrics is not consistent across all disciplines within the school. The rubrics are intended to assess these learning expectations and provide important evidence of the mission and learning objectives' permeation into the culture of the school. Teachers use these rubrics to plan their instruction and assessments so that students will be able to achieve proficiency in the skills described in the expectations for student learning. *(Endicott Study, observations, teachers)*

Many teachers at Somerset High School personalize instruction, make connections across disciplines, engage students as active and self-directed learners, involve students in higher order thinking, and provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills. Ninety-six percent of faculty members believes that the instruction is personalized in order to allow for student success. In many classes and across the learning levels, students benefit from personalized instruction. The small size of many AP and Level 1 classes enables teachers of these classes to highly personalize their instruction. In lower learning level classes, teachers use grouping strategies or paired work to increase personalization. Various programs are in place to provide focused instruction for struggling students including peer tutoring, after school homework clubs, and MCAS remediation classes in ELA and mathematics. Directed studies also provide opportunities for students to get highly personalized assistance and instruction from the supervising teachers. Teachers use a variety of assignments and types of assessments in their instruction, which assures multiple learning opportunities and support for students with different learning styles. In many classes, students experience hands-on and self-directed lessons that generate strong student interest and engagement. Observations and examples of student work provide evidence that many teachers utilize instructional strategies that require students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills and depth of understanding. Although teachers report the use of strategies that promote student self-reflection and self-assessment, and some student work samples indicate the application of these strategies, it is not clear how pervasive and deliberate is the promotion of student reflection across disciplines and throughout the school. Teachers report a few

interdisciplinary lessons among some departments, including science and English, art and foreign language, and other departments. For example, the ELA and social studies departments reinforce connections between disciplines through shared rubrics (six traits plus 1 writing rubric). Nonetheless, students and parents suggest that there is very little of this kind of instructional connection between departments. The absence of structured time for collaborative interdepartmental discussion is one impediment to more effective and frequent interdisciplinary connection in instruction. Students at Somerset High School (SHS) benefit from the challenging, rigorous, personalized, and engaging instructional strategies. However, all departments should improve and expand the opportunities for student self-reflection and interdisciplinary connections, so that students will be able to fulfill their potential to become lifelong learners. (*Endicott Study, observation, self-study, student work, teachers, students*)

Teachers at Somerset High School use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, and supervisors as a means of improving instruction. Many teachers informally request student input about instruction, extended activities, or new courses. Typically, this may happen in the form of end-of-term surveys, reflective questions at the end of assignments or informal questions at the end of units or activities. Nonetheless, student and parent responses suggest very little solicitation of parent or student ideas for improving instruction. Teachers report that the most effective feedback relating to instructional strategies takes place in the context of conversation and collegial reflection within the department. The existence of department offices for all disciplines at Somerset High School has provided frequent though informal opportunities for teachers to discuss, share, and modify their instruction through collegial discussion among their fellow content specialists. Teachers share lesson plans, discuss effective strategies, and develop common assessments. Mentoring of new teachers provides yet another mechanism to provide valuable feedback to instructors beginning their careers. The supervisory and evaluation processes provide feedback and recommendations for all teachers. Ultimately, teachers have frequent opportunities to receive and reflect upon feedback from a variety of co-educators, promoting beneficial change and refinement of instructional approaches and strategies. However, the development of a school-wide mechanism to more effectively elicit, recognize, and utilize student and parent feedback on instruction and instructional practices is necessary to advance a more effective partnership with parents and the community. (*self-study, teachers, Endicott Study*)

Teachers at SHS demonstrate expertise in the content they teach, are knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflect on their own practices. One hundred percent of SHS teachers is highly qualified in their core content areas. Teachers add to their content expertise through participation in graduate programs, content specific professional development, and participation in professional organizations related to their content areas. Content area departments have sought and participated in department-wide professional development through such providers as the Teaching American History Grant and the Annenberg Foundation. These professional development opportunities offer instruction in the content as well as the pedagogy of the disciplines. Beyond the above, 69% of SHS teachers holds advanced degrees. Observations of classes provide additional evidence of teachers' expertise in

both the content of their disciplines and the effective delivery of instruction to their students. Over 80% of students reports their teachers know the material taught in their classes and are prepared for class. Parent interviews also support a perception of teacher competence and effectiveness. Over the past several years, student failures have been reduced each year. Teachers engage in frequent discussions within their departments about their content and instruction. Additional opportunities to reflect on their practice occur through participation in some professional development and through their evaluation process. Overall, the competence, effectiveness, and professional reflection of SHS teachers contributes to student success as demonstrated through such outside measures as MCAS testing. (*Endicott Study, self-study, teachers, parents*)

The formal discussion of instructional strategies is not a significant part of the professional culture of the school at this time. While 93.8% of the staff reports that they discuss instructional strategies with their colleagues, these conversations take place in person, via e-mail, and in departmental common areas. Although teachers regularly engage in widespread, frequent, informal discussions with their colleagues and content directors within their departments, there is no formal process to ensure collaborative, school-wide, cross-disciplinary discussions. Although all new teachers are assigned a mentor, this formal program is limited in its scope. Additionally, there is no current scheduled block of time in which these formal school-wide discussions could take place. The current teachers' contract allows only one meeting per month, whether it is a faculty or a department meeting. There has been very little time during these meetings specifically set aside for the discussion of instructional strategies across disciplines. In addition, many teachers report that a lack of common planning time remains a factor that limits opportunities to engage in a process to improve instructional strategies. While there are effective, informal discussions taking place within the departments, the results of these discussions have not extended to a school-wide collaboration that could truly become a school-wide culture. Absent a concerted effort to provide the time and structure for true, interdisciplinary discussions of instructional strategies, the essential school culture will not develop and concomitant improvements in student learning will be limited. (*teachers, department leaders, central office leadership team, Endicott Study*)

Teachers have a range of instructional technologies available to support teaching and learning although certain school structures and policies hinder their effective use. Teachers may reserve computer labs, cameras, DVDs, SMARTBoard™, LCD projectors, and other technologies to use within the classroom. Many members of the staff have purchased their own equipment, most often a computer and LCD projector. Students have noted this behavior and expressed their deep respect for the commitment of their teachers. Trainings are available for faculty members to learn how to effectively use and incorporate a range of instructional technologies. Eighty-one percent of the faculty states that they use technology within their classroom. When completing in-school and at-home assignments, 74.2% of the students uses a range of technologies. Students are required to use technology across a variety of grades and disciplines. The music department has computers and software to aid students in composing music. The majority of teachers requires students to learn various office applications, such as Word and PowerPoint. The science department uses Vernier data collection devices in

conjunction with spreadsheet and graphing programs to collect, analyze, and communicate information. Multi-media software and hardware are fundamental in many of the graphic arts and technology courses. While a range of technologies is available, the school-wide, consistent utilization of this technology is not wide-spread. In part, the physical plant of the building hinders effective use. Internet access in areas of the school is sporadic. Access to sufficient and convenient electrical power can be unreliable. Moving equipment through the hallways is not always feasible. Students are expected to use technology as a means to apply knowledge and increase technological literacy, especially computer skills, but progress in the school-wide integration of technology and technology-based instruction and student technological literacy depend upon the removal of limitations imposed by the physical plant. (*Endicott Study, teachers, observations, facility tour*)

Somerset High School encourages teachers to participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. Many teachers have taken advantage of professional development trainings provided by external organizations. For example, a majority of the social studies faculty members participates in the Future History Program, which includes training in the use of primary documents in instruction related to American History. Almost 50% of the faculty has trained in the introductory Research for Better Teaching (RBT) course, which focuses on instructional strategies applicable across all content areas. In addition, the school is supportive and accommodating of teacher interests in other professional development trainings. As a result of this support, some departments have received effective professional development related to instructional strategies. At the same time, the district focus of in-school professional development during the last four to six years has been devoted largely to addressing concerns regarding curriculum and updating the organization of the curricula. Time during in-school professional development days was devoted to themes related to instruction practices, but this was not the primary focus of these sessions nor was it utilized by all departments. Furthermore, 53.8% of the staff feels that professional development in the area of instructional strategies is based on identified student needs. This suggests more analysis is necessary for teachers to determine student needs related to instruction. Data driven analysis of student needs related to instruction leading to school-wide professional development focused on instructional strategies will provide opportunity and skills to effect improvements in the delivery of effective instruction for all students. (*self-study, school leadership team, Endicott Study*)

The teacher supervision and evaluation process is valued by the faculty members as a means to identify and develop effective instructional practices. The evaluation process includes both formative and summative reports. Teachers and administrators report that the formative reports have a greater impact on a teacher's instructional effectiveness. Teachers without professional status are formally evaluated three times per year through three formative reports. Professional status teachers are formally evaluated through a formative report every other year. All teachers receive a summative report. A classroom observation provides the information and evidence for each formative assessment. Conferences are often held to review the intentions and observations of such visits. Currently, an evaluator such as the content coordinator or administrator uses the

Research for Better Teaching (RBT) model grounded in the Principles of Effective Teaching as the benchmarks to assess teacher effectiveness. All evaluators (content directors and administrators) have received the RBT evaluator training. This provides consistency among evaluators regarding identification of effective teaching practices to provide a consistent and reliable formative evaluation report. Teachers are actively encouraged to participate in the teacher-oriented RBT training. This professional development is instruction-based – providing teachers with a repertoire of effective instructional practices. Having evaluators and teachers trained in a common vocabulary is useful in post-evaluation discussions. Currently, fewer than half the teaching staff has been trained in RBT. Additional structures and practices exist within the school to monitor and improve teacher's instructional practices. All new teachers are assigned a mentor; various administrators and content directors frequently walk through and observe classroom teachers possibly resulting in informal debriefing sessions regarding instructional practices. This combination of formal and informal supervision and evaluation processes ensures that students have broad exposure to high quality instruction designed to meet their individual learning needs. (*instruction committee, school leadership team, teachers*)

#### **Commendations:**

1. The variety of instructional strategies used by many teachers that enables students to be actively involved in the learning process
2. A faculty that is highly educated, professionally active, expert in their content area, and diverse in experience
3. Concerted efforts made by faculty members to collaborate with colleagues
4. Commitment of teachers illustrated by their willingness to purchase personal computer and multi-media technology resources for classroom use to promote and enrich student learning
5. The widespread respect students have for their teachers
6. The financial and structural support for professional development
7. The support and encouragement given to new teachers
8. An evaluation process that contributes to the development of effective instructional practices

**Recommendations:**

1. Demonstrate that the instructional strategies integrate the school's academic expectations into the teaching-learning-assessment process in every class at every level
2. Formalize opportunities for teachers to collaborate on the development of interdisciplinary instruction
3. Establish an expectation that cross-disciplinary units and activities be implemented as a regular part of instruction
4. Create a culture that encourages student reflection across all disciplines
5. Establish a formal process to elicit and consider student and parent feedback on instruction and instructional strategies
6. Provide structured opportunities to engage faculty members in formal discussions of instructional strategies both within and across curricular domains
7. Assess all courses and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that higher level thinking skills and an emphasis on depth over breadth of knowledge exists in all classes for all students on all levels
8. Create and implement a technology plan that addresses equitable distribution and use, adequate maintenance, and on-going training to ensure effective integration of technology in the teaching learning process
9. Incorporate instructional strategies and best practices into the school-wide professional development plan

## TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

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# 4

### ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

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Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust the curriculum and instruction to respond effectively to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates to the school community the progress of students in achieving the school's expectations for student learning and course-specific learning goals. Assessment results must be continually discussed to improve curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.
2. The school's professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its social and civic expectations.
3. For each learning activity, teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.
4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.
5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.
7. The school's professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.
8. The school's professional staff shall communicate:
  - individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families;
  - the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.

## Conclusions:

Assessment informs students about their learning progress and teachers concerning ways to adjust curriculum and instruction. At Somerset High School, the mission statement and academic, social and civic expectations are displayed throughout the school building and within the classrooms, in both the student and faculty handbooks, and online. The assessment rubrics for academic expectations and social and civic expectations are included online and in the faculty handbook. Teachers state that departmental and assignment-specific rubrics are embedded in the school-wide rubrics or that they have tweaked the school-wide rubrics in order to fit their own discipline. Although rubrics are used in many assessments in most departments across the curriculum, the use of school-wide rubrics is not consistent or universal. Although school-wide rubrics that are aligned with the mission statement and academic expectations have been written, they have yet to be voted on and approved by the faculty for assessment of academic expectations; these rubrics are not being used to assess student work. Thus, the school does not have in place a process to ensure that all faculty members assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving its academic expectations as they relate to the mission statement. In addition, no department has reported any results of the student data collected from the implementation of at least one of the two expectations adopted as was the original administrative and faculty intent at the beginning of the school year. This disconnect in the classroom and the absence of assessment of the school's mission and academic expectations creates a lack of unity of purpose within and across most disciplines that makes it very difficult for all students to achieve the school's expectations or to understand why they should do so. The school must create and mandate a process based on school-wide rubrics to assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving the academic expectations. *(teachers, classroom observations, department leaders)*

At Somerset High School, civic and social expectations are measured for all students by the tracking of data regarding attendance, tardiness, truancy, drop-out rates, and discipline referrals. Indicators exist, as well, for a number of students involved in co-curricular activities and athletics. Among the many programs available to students to demonstrate civic and social expectations expressed in the mission statement are the Big Buddy program, future teachers, Case Rally, Key Club, student council, homework club, peer mentors, and the music program. Students must meet certain criteria for eligibility and acceptance into such programs. The school reports the endorsement of a community service learning program that will be used as a graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2014, and the development and implementation of a school-wide report card is in the exploratory stage. To date, however, there is no formal means to assess student achievement of social and civic expectations as identified in the mission statement. While the measurement of these expectations is in the formative stages, the school has yet to develop and explain specific indicators to allow teacher to make fair and consistent judgments about student performance or to explain how to understand performance criteria and indicators as tools to improve the very achievement that is being assessed. As a result, it is impossible to communicate to students and to the community the progress made towards achievement of such expectations. *(school leadership team, school improvement plan, assessment committee)*



At Somerset High School, teachers have worked hard to devise and incorporate a wide variety of class assessments and activities. While not officially selected, each department is responsible for two or three academic expectations. In some classrooms, such as those of foreign languages, science, English, mathematics, and engineering, there is a display of identified expectations. Student work suggests that many teachers identify those course-specific goals for which students will be assessed and make use of exemplars and rubrics to inform students as to the desired product and basis for grading. Seventy-six percent of students states that they know what is required of them to earn a particular grade. While there is utilization of assignment-specific rubrics and exemplars, the inconsistent use of school-wide rubrics does not inform the students of the level of achievement of academic expectations they have reached. (*classroom observations, student work, Endicott Study*)

Content rubrics are in wide use at Somerset High School to assess specific expectations as displayed in a variety of ways across the curriculum. Teachers state that many rubrics have been “tweaked” to align their assessments with the school-wide rubrics and that use of rubrics has been ongoing for many years. However, only a few departments have made use of school-wide rubrics and only within recent weeks has increased implementation taken place. While students are familiar with being graded using departmental content rubrics, they are less familiar with the use of school-wide rubrics to assess their mastery of the academic expectations. Rubrics are used across the curriculum; the English department has written benchmarks and utilizes the 6 Traits Writing Rubric. Oral presentations across the curriculum are assessed with the oral presentation rubric sometimes adjusted to better fit the discipline; the foreign language department has oral and written rubrics for assessment purposes and has compiled a list of open response questions that supports MCAS testing. The robotics class has an electronic website for display of shared exemplars graded with rubrics; the engineering technology program exhibits student work graded with rubrics for both content and the academic expectations, and the art department uses both a creativity and process rubric for assessment of student work. Additionally, the technology department uses a rubric to assess student writing skills.

Mid-year and final common exams have not been implemented throughout all disciplines. Those who have utilized common exams have been able to analyze student test results in order to improve their curriculum and instruction. The foreign language department analyzes the final exam at the beginning of the following year and makes appropriate changes where necessary to curriculum and instruction. While there are examples of teacher use of school-wide expectations and rubrics are used to evaluate these expectations, such implementation is not widespread throughout the high school. Many teachers have not yet made clear to students how these school-wide academic expectations apply to their courses or how the students will be assessed on achieving them. Students are not aware of the importance of the academic expectations and their aligned rubrics. While there are posted academic expectations for learning, most teachers do not use these rubrics to assess student learning. Because teachers do not uniformly or consistently use the school-wide rubrics, they cannot monitor ongoing student progress. Common rubrics are developed by a few departments for similar content or courses and for the essay portion of mid-terms and final exams. However, for each learning activity, teachers do not consistently clarify for students the school-wide academic expectations. When the qualities of work expected at various levels of performance are described, students can better understand what needs to be changed in the work to achieve a higher level of performance. Faculty members and students

need to understand how to use rubrics for qualitative assessment of work and to understand discrete differences in levels of performance in order for teachers to assess student progress in meeting school-wide academic expectations for learning and for students to understand their assessments. When the school-wide rubrics are used, the assessment results can be used to improve curriculum and instruction. It may be necessary to provide professional development in the creation and use of rubrics to benefit both students and teachers. The lack of uniformity in the use of school-wide rubrics and common exams results in inconsistency that neither serves to inform the students of progress towards achieving the academic expectations as expressed in the mission statement nor provides useful data for the faculty in its efforts to discuss and revise curriculum and instruction. (*students, teachers, self-study*)

Teachers at SHS use a variety of assessments to measure student learning and course objectives but not to measure growth over time. In programs that require hands-on activities and in special education classes, there is a greater use of alternative assessments and performance-based assessments than in core academic courses. The types of assessments most often used are class participation, short answers, multiple choice, open response, and homework. Assessments used least often are oral quizzes, journals, long compositions, and portfolios. Additionally, some teachers are using hands-on projects, research papers, oral presentations, test essays, and long written responses. Rubrics are regularly used for student assessment in most content areas as summative assessments. However, no formal process or formative assessment rubrics are in place to measure growth and student progress toward achievement of school-wide academic expectations over time. Measuring student growth over time allows the teacher to determine progress in student knowledge, skills, and competencies as identified in the academic expectations for student learning and to begin to make necessary curricular revisions and improve instruction. However, this is also the purpose of an effective school-wide rubric used and understood by all teachers and students. Consistent collection and recording data will give a powerful meaningful database for improving curriculum and instruction. (*classroom observations, student work, teachers*)

Collaboration among teachers at Somerset High School appears to be limited to that afforded by the proximity of departmental classes and a common office. There are some efforts made by some departments to meet to collaborate; the foreign language department meets at the beginning of each school year to do item analysis of final exams; the English department conducts item analysis for MCAS purposes; the math and science departments utilize Test Wiz and Trans Scan, a data collection means of scoring grades electronically. However, there are limited opportunities for collaboration with staff members in other departments in order to develop, revise, and inform a broad range of assessment strategies in curriculum and instruction. Thus, while some teachers meet informally, there is no formal process in place whereby teachers can meet to collaborate to plan assessment strategies, analyze student work, revise curriculum, or improve instruction. Best practice indicates that the most effective teaching is done to improve the rigor of instruction and quality of assignments when teachers meet regularly to reflect on their pedagogy and use multiple assessment results to assess student learning. Because individual, private, and department reflection is more the norm of the school culture than regular cross-collegial sharing, not all students benefit from the experience gained by those individual teachers who were involved in periodic departmental meetings. (*teachers, department leaders, self-study*)

While some departments have received minimal professional development for the creation of assessment strategies, there has been no professional development program implemented to engage the entire faculty. Limited opportunities impede collaboration among staff members at Somerset High School. Only within the past few years have faculty members been afforded some opportunities to develop assessment strategies or to write or revise curriculum, and in preparation for the NEASC visit. Fifty-eight percent of the faculty believes the professional development program provides them with opportunities to collaborate with other teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies. There is no room in the daily schedule to provide for common planning time, no monthly department meetings exist within the yearly schedule, and a common faculty room is non-existent. Although there is informal collaboration within departments and there are some external outside collaboration opportunities in place, such as that with the East Bay Educational and South Coast Collaboratives, there is no established program whereby teachers can collectively collaborate within the high school for the purposes of developing assessment strategies. There is a need to use multiple sources of data, both quantitative and qualitative, to show growth in learning over a period of time and to validate instructional practice. In order to effectively assess student learning, formal opportunities for collaboration need to be ongoing and maintained and professional development in interpretation and a protocol to examine the work need to be provided. *(teachers, school leadership team, Endicott Study)*

Information about the school and its educational program is found on the school's web site. Somerset High School communicates often to parents and the community on the status of student achievement, but this communication is not connected to school-wide academic expectations. Somerset High School teachers communicate individual student academic progress to students and families by way of parent teacher conferences, quarterly report cards, e-mail communication, and by bi-weekly or monthly progress reports when necessary. The adoption of the on-line MMS Grade Book has allowed easy accessibility by parents. At present, only the mid-year and final exams must be entered electronically by teachers, but some teachers enter all grades, allowing transparency and accessibility. As a means to communicate achievement of social and civic expectations, Somerset High School affords opportunities that allow public/community recognition. Students have been recognized through the annual recognition assembly, the morning announcements, banquets, programs such as student of the month, student acknowledgements at the school advisory council, publications lauding student achievements in music and art, and display of student art at the James White Gallery and Somerset Public Library as well as other venues. To communicate student achievement, the guidance department issues press releases for success on SAT/PSAT exams and MCAS and AP exams. The honor roll is published quarterly and information regarding student success is dispersed at monthly faculty meetings and through the weekly e-mail letter entitled "Pineault Speaks". While course syllabi, grading policies, and class expectations are given to parents at the open house in the fall of each school year, these documents do not yet include the school's academic expectations nor explain how they are integrated into the course and will be assessed. Parents report positively about the communication between faculty and parents. Students demonstrate respect for their teachers. An atmosphere of respect pervades the school. School-wide academic expectations will become familiar to parents and community members when their presence in school publications and their importance as guiding principles become part of the

communications from teachers to student and/or parents. (*parents, students, school leadership team, self-study*)

**Commendations:**

1. Implementation of the 6 Traits writing rubric by the English department and efforts to extend it to other content areas
2. Widespread use of content specific-rubrics and exemplars
3. Endorsement of the Community Service Learning Program beginning with Class of 2014
4. The use of student web pages in the robotics program that include the use of rubrics to measure student proficiency in school-wide academic expectations

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop and implement a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics
2. Develop and use agreed upon levels of performance indicators to assess the progress of all students in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations
3. Ensure that teachers base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics and that students understand rubrics and how to use them to improve learning
4. Create and implement a formal evaluation process to measure and report student achievement of the academic expectations
5. Provide opportunities to increase both teacher understanding and consistent use of school-wide rubrics
6. Develop and implement departmental and school-wide criteria and procedures for the review of assessment results for the improvement of instruction
7. Implement formal structures for the faculty to meet as a full body to discuss student work and assessments relative to instructional and curricular needs
8. Establish procedures for determining school-wide professional development needs relative to using assessment results and create a staff development plan that provides opportunities for teachers to improve their use of assessment results in curriculum revision and modifications of instructional methodologies

9. Regularly report to the public the progress of students in meeting the school's stated academic expectations for student learning

## **SUPPORT STANDARDS**

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**LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION**

**SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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## **SUPPORT STANDARD**

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# **5**

## **LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION**

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The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership, and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices which supports student learning and well-being.

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the principal shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.
4. The organization of the school and its educational programs shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
6. The schedule shall be driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.
9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.
10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.
11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

## Conclusions:

A majority of the school committee of the Somerset School District reports that they have given the principal of Somerset High School the responsibility, autonomy, and decision-making authority to run the school on a day-to-day basis and that the principal provides leadership for the total school program. However, the principal does not have final authority over some school-based decisions including some hiring decisions, although he must deal with their repercussions and unintended consequences. While the principal is charged with the creation of the budget, the program of studies, and the student parent handbook, some school-based decisions are made in partnership with the central office, limiting the principal's power and available options and his ability to create and execute his vision for continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Central office personnel are routinely present at Somerset High School (SHS), widely visible to both school staff members and students. In addition, the central office has assumed responsibility for the induction of new teachers, characterizing the majority of the teachers at SHS, 75-80% of whom have joined the faculty over the past five years. It is a widely shared opinion among the SHS faculty members and the visiting team that the principal does not have sufficient autonomy to articulate a coherent direction and vision for the high school. Thus, a review and revision of the defined responsibility of the school administrators, especially the principal, must be undertaken to clarify his role and give him sufficient autonomy. *(teachers, department leaders, central office personnel, school leadership team)*

While the principal is the leader of the school, the department leaders provide the educational leadership, direction, and vision for each department. Most teachers enjoy working as a team within their departments and respect and value the leadership provided by the department leaders. Teachers report that within their departments they disaggregate student assessment performance data, make changes to curriculum, and discuss instructional strategy. Support and direction also comes from the central office via the curriculum director. The curriculum director, who works directly with individuals and small groups of teachers, brings a K-12 perspective to his work at the high school. The content of on-going professional development is determined by the individual teachers, often in consultation with their department leaders, based on their own perceived needs as well as common needs of many of them. Because 75-80% of faculty members are new to the profession, many of them are actively involved in professional development that they consider useful to their teaching practice or are enrolled in courses that will lead to an advanced degree. Many enroll in the same courses over the years, often at the encouragement of their peers, department chairs, and/or the district curriculum director, effectively producing a common language for improving classroom practice among many of the teachers. Over the past several years, student failures have been reduced each year. Faculty members report that the drop in failing grades is largely a product of teacher enthusiasm and the variety of classroom practices they initiate, both of which are disseminated, tempered, and augmented by staff members, primarily within the common department offices. Teachers and department leaders are looking for direction to develop a common, school-wide vision rather than the multitude of visions created department by department. Although this paradigm of individual and department-level leadership has produced many positive developments within the disciplines, these developments are part of the laudable results of past initiatives and decisions



taken by the staff. This admirable momentum should form the basis of a school-wide coherence resulting in new opportunities for synergy and progress towards a unified vision of excellence for both teachers and students over the next ten years. Department leaders have expressed a sincere and unanimous desire to become a true leadership team working hand in hand with a visionary-leader principal. These department leaders are aware of the latent potential within the vibrant, young, and motivated faculty, many of whom they were largely responsible for hiring. This potential could power teaching and learning to significantly higher levels. They also feel as a group of experienced department leaders that they are ready to participate in and actualize such a vision. A visionary, effective leader should harness this potential before it dissipates to take the level of teaching and learning at SHS to new heights. That leadership should include ongoing conversations with the department leaders and faculty members, as well as the community at large, through the four bodies created to include such purposes, i.e., the principal's advisory council (PAC), the school advisory council (SAC), the faculty advisory council (FAC), and the parent teacher organization (PTO). Outreach beyond these bodies would also be helpful. The conversations should include an exploration of the direction, articulation, and implementation of a shared school-wide vision and would include discussion of how to enhance the associated skills and knowledge of faculty members throughout the high school. One positive outcome of these conversations must continue the admirable common culture of expectations and support among the individual departments to create a second ring of shared expectations that is at the scale of the entire school and that is focused on the mission and expectations for student learning. *(teachers, department leaders, students)*

A review of the process by which the mission statement was created reveals that the school crafted the statement based on validating current practices in the classroom rather than on the research and exploration of best practices, introspection, or self-evaluation. In their classrooms, teachers do not currently emphasize connections to the mission statement on a daily basis, nor are students aware that these links exist, even implicitly. There must be an energizing and visionary mission that is seen throughout the school as the primary driver for teachers to improve their departmental, interdepartmental, and classroom practices and for all students to achieve proficiency in the stated expectations for student learning. *(organization committee, students, school leadership team).*

In core academic classes, students are grouped by interest and performance level. Teachers for the academic courses recommend students be placed in one of four performance levels, but parents may request the guidance department to change the student's course or performance level, and this request is usually acted upon. The school committee unanimously reports that current grouping practices meet students' needs while fewer than two-thirds of parents concurs. Students generally take most of their classes, particularly in the academic subjects, at the same performance level, even though it is unlikely that individual students would have such evenly distributed interests and abilities across a wide range of subjects. This enrollment pattern develops despite a program of studies and schedule that permit students to enroll in classes at any of the four performance levels, including the AP level, with reasonable pre-requisites in math and science sequential courses. Such restricted choices by students, even if self-imposed, at this formative time in their lives, can affect their life-long attitudes towards challenge and opportunity as well as their intellectual, artistic, and social self-confidence. Overall, the existing grouping patterns at the school do not challenge a significant segment of

students to take advantage of the fullest opportunity to succeed and achieve the school's mission and expectations for student learning. Thus, grouping practices should be studied in light of current theories of pedagogy to determine the best system to challenge all students. (*teachers, self-study, school leadership team*)

The school's schedule is driven by student need and interest. The eight-period, eight-day cycle allows for an increased number of electives and accommodates science labs, particularly those required for advanced placement classes. However, many students' schedules also include guided studies, which are supervised study halls. The number of guided study periods varies widely among students, with some students' schedules having a disproportionate number compared to academic or elective classes. Seventy-four percent of students affirms that they feel the schedule allows them to access the courses they need, however. While a few faculty members report that they have suggested looking into alternative schedules, the majority believes the current format is effective for this school. The faculty has thus reconciled its selection of a highly flexible schedule with the acceptance of a large number of guided study periods for a significant portion of the student body. With staffing levels essentially unchanged over the recent years, the school finds it difficult to take advantage of such a schedule to offer sufficient sections of elective courses so that more students can take advantage of them and use of guided study periods could be minimized. Moreover, the schedule does not allow for sufficient common professional time, including common planning time, in the school schedule. In fact, curriculum guides containing the school's mission and expectations for student learning have not been completed for all subject areas in part because of a lack of common professional time to complete these documents. SHS will better meet the goals of its mission and expectations if it evaluates the effectiveness of the existing schedule and makes refinements to promote collegial sharing, the ability of students to more broadly access elective courses, and the use and greater array of instructional and assessment techniques by faculty members suitable to long blocks of instructional time. (*Endicott Study, parents, students, teachers, school leadership team, curriculum guides, department leaders*)

A variety of forums are in use that allows each of the school stakeholders to have a role in decision-making. The principal's advisory council (PAC), school advisory council (SAC), faculty advisory council (FAC), and parent teacher organization (PTO). The FAC, operated entirely by and for teachers, provides a forum for teachers to look at issues related to teaching and learning as well as school organizational matters. They often generate and implement solutions themselves, and at other times make recommendations or refer concerns to building administrators. The guidance department accords parents a significant role throughout the year in the planning and adjustment of their students' course of study and daily schedule. While teachers recommend both course and level, parents can request a specific level, and this request is almost always honored, even beyond a standard add-drop period. The school advisory council is responsible for overseeing the school budget and reviewing the student handbook, which they have updated over the past two years. The FAC, SAC, and PAC understand each other's roles and work well together to drive coherent changes in the educational program. The school administrators have accorded considerable autonomy to the department leaders to develop and lead their respective departments' educational programs. The department leaders and ad hoc working groups of teachers seek advice and direction in these matters from the district curriculum director and/or outside resources. As laudable and varied as is the staff input to

decision-making, little input originates with students. Only 42% of students mentions that they have a say in important decisions made at the school. Only 38% of parents reports that they have a say in important decisions. The apparent lack of engagement of these vital stakeholders is detrimental to a shared sense of respect and support for the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the lack of a meaningful role for these stakeholders will diminish their investment in the potential success of the school as they are not embraced as co-equal voices in the important and meaningful roles all segments are afforded in the decision-making processes. *(parents, students, teachers, Endicott Study)*

There is a wide range of class sizes in most departments, varying from two to thirty at the extremes, which are rare. Some teachers report that despite inconsistencies in class size, their student loads enable them to meet students' academic needs. The larger classes do not easily permit individualized attention, feedback, or open response assessments, however. In the same way, the larger teacher loads, such as the average of 91 students for each English teacher, curtail the amount of individualized and detailed feedback to students. The negative effects of larger class sizes are magnified in those areas such as the science labs and art and music spaces whose physical layout does not allow teachers or students to locate or to move around within the space effectively. The combination of large class sizes and outdated science labs imposes safety concerns that constrain the number and type of science learning experiences that can be planned. Teachers report that problems caused by a lack of space, lack of preventive maintenance, and an aged facility are more prohibiting than class load or class size issues and have a more adverse impact upon teaching and learning. *(self-study, observation, teachers, organization committee)*

At the present time, there is no ongoing program designed to personalize each student's educational experiences and/ or work with the student to move towards mastery of the student learning expectations. However, 68.3% of the student population and 75% of parents feel that there is at least one adult at the school, in addition to the guidance counselor, whom the students can trust if the student is in crisis. Clearly, a dedicated program to personalize each student's educational program would encompass many students who presently rely on their own resources and priorities. Without a formal program to ensure that every student has an adult who can effectively support and guide them, students will not have a model from which to develop meaningful relationships in their schooling and future. Consequently, many students who do not have a connection with an adult staff member in the high school feel no connection with the school. This limits a sense of belonging and hampers learning and participation in the educational program. Many students wish for a more consistent connection with an adult member of the faculty as well. Thus, the school should investigate the various formats used and curricula for a successful, useful advisory program. *(self-study, students, observation, teachers, school leadership team).*

The primary locus of professional collaboration is within departments. Although this collaboration is informal in most cases, it is regular and on-going and highly valued among the staff members for its contribution to their respective professional growth. The primary mechanism for this collaboration is the placement of teacher desks in a common department office rather than in assigned classrooms. The collegial discussions that take place among professionals who find themselves together, even for the few minutes between classes, drive much of the individual teacher innovation, aligned skill development, and planned conceptual growth within content areas, dissemination of effective teaching strategies and lessons, and the

informal mentoring of new faculty members. These informal approaches are applauded, but the lack of formally scheduled time for professional collaboration across departments should be addressed. Unfortunately, departments currently operate largely in isolation from each other and are generally unaware of each other's programs and initiatives. Opportunities for formal collaboration across departments do not exist at this time. Formal, scheduled opportunities for planning programs, staff development, and vertical and horizontal articulation of the curriculum would contribute to a richer professional experience for teachers across departments as well as for their students. Failure to provide adequate professional collaborative time limits the school's ability to effectively improve the curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment practices. *(district leadership team, school leadership team, teachers, department leaders)*

This is a student-centered school where all members of the school staff are actively involved in supporting the educational program and the well-being of all students. There are many effective programs to support at-risk students: the homework club, the integrated program, alternative classes, Flex Day, extended day, and credit recovery program. Staff members refer students to the intervention team, which is comprised of the school adjustment counselor, the principal, the two assistant principals, the lead guidance counselor, the school nurse, the director of special education, and the integrated program instructor, all of whom meet weekly to consider referrals and appropriate action. The evening program school, although a separate entity, collaborates closely with SHS faculty members and administrators to provide opportunities for students to earn a diploma in a non-traditional environment. The many support programs create a fine-meshed safety net for at-risk students. The school adjustment counselor provides counseling to students and families and conducts initial assessments of students, including screenings for anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and self-injurious behaviors. The school nurse provides daily student health assessments and preventive care services. The nurse also collaborates with the school adjustment counselor to make important and timely referrals of students to the intervention team. These referrals identify students who might otherwise bypass the safety net of programs that could improve their learning. In general, the efforts to promote the well-being of students at SHS involve all members of the school community. Staff members are encouraged to be active in the school setting and are valued for the roles they play. Many staff members are active in clubs and activities, and most staff members are known to participate in fund-raising and celebratory events. *(Endicott Study, teachers, students, school leadership team, custodial staff)*

Somerset High School recognizes student success in a number of ways. Student accomplishments are regularly celebrated, acknowledged, and displayed. Every department chooses a student to recognize each month, some prominently displaying the student's picture and recognition. Other student accomplishments are celebrated during morning announcements. Music and sports banquets celebrate students' achievements in those co-curricular activities. The National Honor Society holds an awards assembly in the spring. A recognition assembly is held in June to honor and recognize students' academic, co-curricular, and community-service activities. Student work is proudly displayed in classrooms and hallways. Recognizing student work and success increases student pride and the motivation to learn. *(observations, students, teachers, school leadership team, self-study)*

School spirit is palpable at SHS. Students and faculty members feel generally safe within the building. There is a culture of tolerance and acceptance among the students, both vertically from the freshmen to the seniors, as well as across different interest groups. Students are provided with a system of policies and practices that promote personal choice and freedom that generates a sense of belonging. They are vocal in their admiration and respect for teachers. Teachers may concentrate on teaching, and students may concentrate on learning, with a minimum of interference from social problems. Students and faculty members' support and share in the creation of a positive school culture. Students maintain an exemplary hallway, classroom, cafeteria, and dismissal decorum with mutually respectful interactions between staff and students both in and out of the classroom. The members of individual departments have a high degree of camaraderie, loyalty, and mutual support towards each other, resulting in a great deal of pride in their departments and ownership of the learning that their respective departments generate. In sharp contrast, the Endicott Study reports that 64.8% of the students feels that the teachers respect students and that 40.2% of students' reports that they respect teachers. Almost 40% of students reports that bullying is a problem at SHS. The guidance department and administration have recognized the pernicious effect of this problem for at least five years when the anti-bullying policy was developed in consultation with outside expertise. The faculty and administration have been trained in how to identify occurrences of bullying and to address them effectively, and protocols have been developed and are followed. These protocols include working with both the families of perpetrators and victims and, when appropriate, the legal system. Administrators address the student body on the first day of school each year regarding the negative effects of bullying and disciplinary consequences. Although 63.9% of students reported that they feel safe at school with 84.1% of staff feeling the same, the survey did not identify whether the feelings among those who do not feel safe originated with the social or with the physical conditions in the school. The contrast of the observed positive student and staff behaviors with the reported percentages from the school survey on perceived safety may be the result of the particular environment within the school at the time the survey was taken and/or to a reaction to the physical conditions of the school. In any case, most faculty members feel that students are well-behaved in school and at school-sponsored events. Support personnel indicate that they feel respected professionally and are constructively involved in the main culture of the school. Most faculty members perceive Somerset High School to be a desirable place to work. The current behavioral record is clearly indicative of a school that is being successful at getting the majority of its student body to achieve within the social and civic expectations of the institution. (*school leadership team, teachers, students, self-study, observations*)

Slightly over 75% of the staff reports that the school committee supports the mission and expectations for student learning, while 100% of the school committee believes they do. The school committee members see themselves as advisory in terms of implementation of the mission statement and expectations for student learning. They are aware of and support the school's mission. The school committee is involved with policy and finances. Finances are connected to the school's mission and student expectations insofar as they assist with the implementation of the school's programs. The school committee actively supports the SHS budget, much of which originates with teachers. Many of the staff and students are frustrated with the limitations of the physical plant and the negative impact that it has on teaching and learning. Many wish that the school committee would more actively advocate and provide the

leadership to the school community to remedy this problem. (*teachers, school committee, students, self-study*)

**Commendations:**

1. The leadership role of department leaders to advance the teaching capacity of their staff and to examine performance data to improve student achievement
2. The use of informal collaboration time within departments to discuss teaching strategies and student work
3. The extraordinary efforts of the faculty to reduce student failures in each of the past several years
4. The individual expenditure of personal resources by faculty members to improve and enrich classroom environments
5. The variety and number of effective programs that support a wide spectrum of at-risk students
6. The positive, respectful, and supportive school climate that advances a spirit of pride and ownership
7. The numerous programs that celebrate the accomplishments and success of students
8. The proactive program in place to address bullying in the high school

**Recommendations:**

1. Accord the principal the autonomy and authority to lead and enact the vision for the school, including hiring, promotion, and managing school-based personnel
2. Develop and crystallize a coherent mission and student expectations for the school for which all staff members feel ownership and dedication
3. Articulate and promote, in a clear and consistent manner in consultation with faculty and departmental leaders, a clear vision for improving teaching and learning
4. Evaluate the impact of course leveling on students' self-esteem and achievement using the extensive research available on grouping and best practices to make any needed adjustments to improve learning for all students and not by a preconceived notion of student ability

5. Maximize the existing master schedule to allow for greater flexibility of student programming, including guided studies, smaller class sizes for teachers, and adaptability to schedule students into unique schedules
6. Provide professional collaborative time for teachers to meet within and across departments in order to address common planning time, collaborative examination of student work, and curriculum revision
7. Develop and implement a plan to include students and parents to have a voice in decisions that affect teaching, learning, and school culture
8. Create a formal, ongoing program through which each student is connected with an adult member of the school community

## SUPPORT STANDARD

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# 6

## SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

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Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

### All Student Support Services

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.
3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
4. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
5. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.

6. Student records, including health and immunization records, shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.
7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services.

### Guidance Services

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:
  - individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;
  - personal, career, and college counseling;
  - student course selection assistance;
  - collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
  - appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

### Health Services

9. The school's health services shall provide:
  - preventive health services and direct intervention services;
  - appropriate referrals;
  - mandated services;
  - emergency response mechanisms;
  - ongoing student health assessments.



## Conclusions:

The Somerset High School Student Support Services are aligned with the school's mission and expectations for student learning. All support service programs participated in developing the mission statement. The school makes concerted efforts to engage students in the educational program and services of Somerset High School. While the responsibility to students and families vary, the library/media, health, guidance, and special education services all focus on those students who need resources in order to meet the academic, social, and civic expectations of the school. Student surveys and parent feedback indicate that the school's support services positively impact student progress toward academic excellence and provide a safe and secure environment that addresses students' emotional, physical, and social needs. (*self-study, student shadowing, panel presentation, parents*)

The library program has numerous supports in place to address the academic expectations. However, while the library media center is available for both research information and Internet resources, few students and faculty members use these services. While it is clear from examples of student work that research projects are regularly assigned, it is also clear that connection with the library program is not a requirement of the research process. Thirty-four percent of students agrees that they use the library frequently during class. This limits the library's and the school's ability to adequately fulfill the research expectations outlined in their mission that are available to all students. (*teachers, library staff, nursing staff, self-study, Endicott Study*)

The school allocates sufficient resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for learning. This is reflected primarily in the staffing and adequacy of programs and service levels in the health services and library departments, which are exemplary, and in the guidance and special education departments, where the staffing and adequacy of programs and service levels are satisfactory. Moreover, the funding levels for materials in the library, guidance, and special education department are adequate. Support programs have the funds they need to provide students and faculty members with the tools necessary to achieve the school's expectations. (*self-study, teachers, library personnel*)

Student support personnel at Somerset High School enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff members to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. The lead guidance counselor, the school adjustment counselor, the school nurse, the special education coordinator, and the assistant principals meet on a weekly basis as an intervention team to address the needs of at-risk students. The intervention team is available to consult with faculty and staff members regarding concerns for student support accommodations. Counselors, teachers, and nurses refer students to appropriate resources within the school community. When student needs exceed the resources of the school adjustment counselor, referrals are made to appropriate outside agencies. The school adjustment counselor is also able to reach out to community agencies and bring outside mental health therapists into the building during the school day to meet with students. The presence of school resource officers enhances the feeling of safety and security in the building. The school librarian and staff are available to assist students and other staff members with research projects

and gathering of necessary information. They also support student learning through original cataloging of all books and reviews-based collection development. This provides students with access to quality materials that encourage lifelong learning skills. (*students, staff, counselors, self-study, Endicott Study*)

Special education provides appropriate services for all students whose IEPs or 504 plans require them. Their inclusion model ensures that students of all learning styles and abilities have an equal chance at meeting the school's academic, social, and civic expectations. Special education services undergo a program audit each year by an independent consultant. The health services personnel also support those expectations through contact with and monitoring of individual students, as needed. Health services personnel are evaluated annually by the building principal in conjunction with the town nurse; however, the program itself is not audited or evaluated. As well, guidance and library programs are not regularly evaluated in any meaningful way. Moreover, there are no formal tools in place for support services to be evaluated by students, parents, or community members. The absence of a formal evaluation and review process for all student support services hinders these programs and services from adequately gauging the needs of learners and the community and limits the support programs' opportunities for growth. (*self-study, teachers, staff, school leaders*)

Numerous systems are in place for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel that are designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs. Seventy-three percent of parents reports that they are very satisfied with the communication and effectiveness of student support services. Although the library's website is several years out of date, the library media center creates and publishes a monthly newsletter that is e-mailed to faculty members and updates them on the library's offerings and services. The librarian plans to revamp and update the website and to begin publishing a monthly newsletter for students. The execution of those two improvements will greatly enhance the library's outreach and communication services. The guidance department writes four newsletters each month – one for each grade – and publishes them online. It also offers evening programs for parents throughout the school year that focus on college admissions and financial aid. The MMS grade book, a recently installed online program, is available to parents so they can view their child's grades from home as teachers post them. While the system is capable of tracking grades throughout the semester, homework completion, and other measures of student work, only midterm and final grades are required to be posted online. This limits the information that parents are able to review of their children's progress, achievement, and fulfilled responsibilities. The special education department is connected with an active parent advisory council that publishes a monthly newsletter, meets regularly, and sponsors guest speakers and relevant workshops. Additionally, the special education department is represented at all parent orientation programs for incoming students and at the annual meeting to introduce new teachers to the community. Communications with individual parents take place on an as-needed basis. The communication used by the student support services enables the SHS community to maintain a supportive environment conducive to meeting the individual needs of all students. (*self-study, Endicott Study, library staff, teachers, parents*)

Student records, including health and immunization records, are maintained in a confidential and secure manner that is consistent with federal and state law. Biographical data is stored in the main school office on a password protected computer to which only a few key staff members have access. The school has three servers that secure incoming and outgoing information. Health and immunization records are kept in locked filing cabinets in the nurse's office, while IEP and 504 information is stored in locked filing cabinets in the special education department office. Library usage records are stored in password protected computers using the Destiny Automation System. Current student transcripts that are needed for daily use by the guidance staff are stored in the guidance office during the day and are secured in a locked room at the end of each school day. Records, including transcripts, of former students are also stored in the locked room, and are not duplicated off-site or in digital form as a backup. This situation creates a threat to the security and integrity of some student records and jeopardizes the trust of the parents and students who overwhelmingly believe that school records are appropriately maintained. *(staff, library staff, guidance, self-study)*

Somerset High School employs a sufficient number of certified/licensed professionals who provide counseling, health, special education, and library media services. The school has one full-time and one part-time registered nurse; one full-time librarian; four full-time counselors, and one full-time adjustment counselor. The special education department has seven full-time teachers and six full-time paraprofessionals who provide services for 101 students who have been identified to have special needs or who have accommodations under 504 plans. *(self-study, panel presentation, staff, teachers)*

The Somerset High School Guidance Department is staffed by student-centered professionals who provide many services for students to meet the expectations within the mission statement. Services include individual meetings for personal, career, and college counseling. Counselors meet with all students individually at least once per year to monitor their progress and to consult about course selections. The guidance staff also conducts workshops through the freshman English classes to ease the transition to high school and introduce the role of the school guidance and adjustment counselors as well as the expectations of the high school. Counselors spend considerably more time with junior and senior students completing the college planning process, including an individual one-hour meeting in their junior year, for initial post-secondary planning. Moreover, they conduct a college planning evening to assist junior students and their families to understand the college application process. The counseling department also coordinates an evening financial aid program for seniors and their parents. In addition, the department website offers timely information, delineated by grade, for students, parents, and the community. Although fundamental to a quality school counseling program, many of the services provided are delivered by traditional methods with limited use of technology. The guidance staff reports spending many hours on non-counseling-related duties including excessive schedule changes, a paperwork intensive course-scheduling process, and its members have complete responsibility for MCAS test administration. These responsibilities often interfere with time spent on direct student services and create a roadblock to instituting a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school counseling program. As well, the guidance staff also supports the delivery of special education services for students by participating in annual meetings, assisting with transition issues, and by serving as members of the educational team for students with individual education plans. One member of the counseling staff serves as the students with disabilities (SSD) coordinator for the

College Board and SAT/AP/PSAT programs, ensuring equal access to college and transition planning for students with disabilities. The guidance department does not formally adhere to a curriculum model such as those sanctioned by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association or the American School Counselors Association. As a result, essential components of a comprehensive school counseling curriculum, including career assessment and interest inventories, are not currently available to all students. The delivery of services that are part of a comprehensive school counseling curriculum would greatly enhance opportunities for students to develop the tools to make informed decisions, develop coping and critical thinking skills, and deal with adversity and opportunities throughout their high school experience and beyond. *(staff, school leaders, students)*

The adjustment counselor is available to provide comprehensive services to students with mental health needs. In addition, should a student need further intervention, the adjustment counselor collaborates with outside agencies and often arranges for a mental health counselor to work with the student at school during the school day. Recognizing that the transition from middle to high school is often difficult, the adjustment counselor and one of the guidance counselors have instituted the big buddies freshmen mentoring program. The initiative provides peer support for the newest members of the high school community. Upper class students must apply for the program and participate in an interview process. Each year, approximately 85 students are chosen to guide and advise incoming ninth grade students. Because of the big buddy program, the school adjustment counselors developed and coordinated a Freshman Shadow Day to further facilitate the transition of incoming ninth graders to the high school. This program affords these freshmen with numerous strategies to transition to the school with minimal difficulties and also enables them to prepare themselves to learn. *(students, guidance staff, teachers, self-study)*

The school's health services program provides essential services to meet the needs of students and to respond to emergency situations. Health services monitors all updates on students' immunizations and reviews physicals for students participating in sports. The nursing staff coordinates services in conjunction with the town nurse who is directly governed by the Massachusetts State Department of Public Health. They provide mandated services such as vision and hearing testing in the ninth grade and height and weight measuring in the tenth grade. Nurses are on duty for the entirety of the school day to respond to emergency health situations or students and/or staff may dial 911 when necessary. In consultation with parents, the school's nursing staff administers and monitors medications for all students who require that service. A daily log of student visits to the health center is maintained, and direct services to individual students are provided on a daily basis in consultation with parents and appropriate health care providers. Health concerns are communicated to students through a bulletin board directly outside the health office and to parents via the monthly guidance newsletters. The nursing staff communicates medical concerns to teachers on a "need-to-know" basis, and teachers are trained in the school's referral system that places students with appropriate crisis personnel when necessary. *(self-study, students, nursing staff)*

The library media center program and materials are becoming fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. The new library media specialist, who began in her position in September 2009, is gaining knowledge of the school's curriculum and is

augmenting the collection appropriately. A freshman orientation program is in place, which familiarizes students with the services of the library, the expectations while in the center, and the materials -- both digital and print -- that the library media center offers. At SHS, some individual teachers and some departments make use of the library media center to support instruction, but school-wide use of the library media center is not part of the culture of the school. Although some teachers use the library's computers and print resources for instructional purposes, some faculty members have yet to fully utilize the library media specialist's research expertise in the collaboration and/or support of instruction. Consequently, the library media center is only partially integrated into the school's curriculum and instruction program. In past years, fewer than 50% of the faculty members have consulted with the librarian about the curriculum, and fewer than 35% of students reports that their teachers regularly use the library for research purposes. The professional knowledge and skills offered by the library media specialist could enhance the whole school's curriculum and instruction to support and improve student learning. As the librarian collaborates more with content-area teachers, it is anticipated that the library program will become more integral to the curriculum and instructional program. *(self-study, teachers, library staff)*

Although the library media specialist is new to her position, she is quickly familiarizing herself with the school's curriculum and is enthusiastic about making the library an integral part of curriculum development and support. She is actively weeding the collection to remove outdated materials and, with the input of teachers, is purchasing new materials to align more closely with the curriculum. The current collection is well-cared for, well-organized, and relevant. However, the library staff is responsible only for print materials; audio/visual materials are handled by a non-library employee. Ideally, those resources should be collected, maintained, and circulated by the library staff members who can judge them for their appropriateness for the grade level and quality of information presented. That would create a more accessible and cohesive print, digital, and multi-media collection for students and teachers to use in teaching and learning. *(self-study, teachers, library staff)*

The range of materials, technologies, and other library/informational services available to students and faculty members is adequate and fosters independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty members to use various school and community information resources and technologies. The library houses a collection of more than 20,000 printed resources -- roughly a 21:1 ratio of materials to students --, which is in line with the American Association of School Librarian Standards. There are 50 computers available within the library space. The library circulates two laptops, two LCD projectors, and one document camera, which requires an LCD projector for use. There is a SMARTBoard™ in the library that rarely is used, however. Separate computers are provided for students enrolled in the Virtual High School, and the library media specialist will soon be serving as site coordinator for that program. With better access and training in available technology within the library for research training, full integration of library information services to support efforts of teachers and students will improve. *(self-study, library staff, teachers)*

Students, faculty, and support staff have regular and frequent access to the library media center, facilities, and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day. This is possible due largely to the exceptional level of staffing that the

school maintains in the library/media center. The librarian opens the center at 7 a.m. each day. One of her secretaries begins the school day with her, while the other secretary arrives two hours later. The staggered schedule allows the library media center to be kept open until 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Teachers are able to schedule time and hold classes in the library media center, but they should collaborate more meaningfully with the library media specialist, and draw on her teaching talents and specialized knowledge of research and information evaluation. Because the library media specialist is not as actively involved in and kept abreast of curriculum revisions, the programs and materials available in the library media center are not integrated into curricula and the instructional program of the school, thereby limiting student access to a full range of 21<sup>st</sup> Century instructional and research practices. (*self-study, teachers, library staff*)

While there is no formal information literacy program in place, the library staff builds on the "Big 6" curriculum that is in effect at the middle and elementary schools. The current library media specialist is well-positioned to help students build on existing knowledge since she previously worked as the elementary librarian. However, there are no opportunities currently in place for the high school library media specialist to coordinate with librarians at other schools limiting the ability of the high school library program and the elementary/middle school library programs to build upon and enhance students' information literacy skills. The library media specialist regularly helps students and faculty members find materials for class work or personal use, and is able to direct patrons to other resources such as the public library system when materials are not available in-school. Increased collaboration with content-area teachers and middle school/elementary librarians will immeasurably strengthen the library's ability to help students learn to perform independent inquiry. (*school resources committee, teachers, library staff*)

Policies are in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet. The policy for selection and removal of materials is delineated in the school committee policy. An acceptable use policy use is signed by every student and a parent or guardian and recorded by the technology specialist before the student is given a logon code to use computers. Weeding of the library collection is done on an ongoing basis to eliminate outdated information and keep the collection accessible, manageable, and relevant. These policies ensure that students are informed and skilled in meeting the demands of an information-based, technology-driven world. (*school resources committee, library staff, teachers*)

The school provides special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. Somerset High School provides several different types of special education programs. Two special educators serve as inclusion teachers, one serves as a teacher in a substantially separate classroom, and one educator engages at-risk students through the integrated study program, which is also available as a support program to regular education students. The general knowledge and support from the special education members has been positive, and regular education teachers are assisted and consulted by special education staff. To build consultation time into the schedule, special education teachers are relieved of a duty period so that there is time to collaborate with classroom teachers. Annual IEP meetings are conducted to receive progress reports, teacher

observations, and monitor the progress of each student. Students are referred for a special education evaluation in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. (*teachers, self-study, staff*)

#### **Commendations:**

1. The availability of the library media center to students and faculty members before and after regular school hours
2. The newly implemented MMS Grade Book portal for student and parent communications
3. The development and implementation of the big buddy and shadow day program to transition ninth grade students to the high school
4. The dedication of student-support professionals
5. The formal networking with community agencies and services to further enhance student support services

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Increase collaboration between teachers and the library media specialist
2. Improve coordination between the high school library media specialist and middle/elementary school library media specialists
3. Give immediate attention to assigning the library/media specialist in the evaluation and revision of curriculum in all curricular areas
4. Revise research requirements in all curricula to include use of library resources and the skills of the library media specialist
5. Integrate video resources with the library's print and digital resources
6. Provide additional training in the use of SMARTBoard™ technology to promote greater use of this technology
7. Establish a system for regular formal evaluation of student support services
8. Develop and implement a plan to provide safeguarded permanent storage for student records
9. Fully implement an online portal to inform parents of grades and homework/assignment status

10. Develop and implement a mission-driven comprehensive guidance curriculum for all students
11. Remove responsibility for MCAS test administration from the guidance department



## **SUPPORT STANDARD**

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# **7**

## **COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and shall encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.
2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.
3. The school site and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and shall be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.
7. There shall be ongoing planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
8. The community and the district's governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.
9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.

## Conclusions:

Somerset High School engages parents and families beginning when parents are invited to a freshman orientation program to provide information on the transition to high school. Parents are invited to a variety of events over the course of a student's four years there including MCAS parent workshops, financial aid seminars, and a mandatory MIAA Wellness Night for athletes. Students involved in the music programs celebrate their accomplishments with their teachers and families at the annual Musictown Festival Ball. The school communicates to parents in the community through e-mail correspondence, student/parent newsletters, parent teacher conferences, mid-quarter reports, and quarterly report cards. The school website provides convenient access to other information such as the school calendar and menu. Important district links on various policies are also found on the website. In addition, parent support groups work to enhance the educational experience for each student. There is a parent teacher organization that contributes to school programs where necessary. The science department was the recipient of funds used to purchase supplies for an outdoor classroom. The friends of music organization supports all of the music programs at the school by volunteering for various events throughout the year and contributing financially to transportation and uniforms. An art teacher states that the friends of music group has occasionally offered support to art programs as well. The parent advisory council for education engages families of special needs students and provides educational workshops on issues surrounding special education. The school's effort to engage parents and families as partners in education has had a direct effect on students in terms of professional and financial support for programs that enhance their learning. In addition, students feel more connected to their school when there is a supportive relationship between teachers and parents. (*students, teachers, parents, school website, self-study*)

There is a wide array of productive community partnerships established with local businesses and higher education institutions at Somerset High School. The business and technology departments have developed partnerships with Bentley University, Johnson and Wales University, The Art Institute, Bridgewater State College, Bryant University, New England Institute of Technology, and Bristol Community College. Students are exposed to opportunities at these institutions through classroom visits and field trips. There are several articulation agreements in place for tech prep courses such as accounting and personal finance at Bristol Community College. Students who complete these courses at BCC can earn college credit upon full-time enrollment. There is also the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs at Johnson and Wales University and Bridgewater State College. The business department also has a long standing relationship with the Gold Medal Bakery of Fall River that began with the owner's request to have students come to his place of business to educate his employees about a new computer system. This collaborative relationship has led to opportunities for students to work at the bakery. Moreover, a letter is sent home to juniors regarding summer internship opportunities. The science department has a long-standing partnership with Dominion Energy. Each year this company contributes approximately \$2,500.00 to sponsor the annual science fair. Students showcase their work, and volunteers from Bristol Community College evaluate the

projects. Members of the community join with students in a shared art-making process that honors and acknowledges the sacrifices of U.S. service men and women. In addition, there is an alumni art show, which is well attended by former Somerset students who return to the school to share their current work with present students and members of the community. The school's effort to foster partnerships provides students with options and real world work experience outside of the classroom that will prepare them for life after high school. (*teachers, students, school leadership team, self-study*)

Somerset High School was originally built in 1936 and additional wings were added to the original building in 1952, 1956, and 1968. The infrastructure is clearly outdated and does not adequately support aspects of the educational program and support services for student learning. The structural integrity of the building is inadequate. In the boiler room, the pressure and shut off valves are corroded rendering them inoperable. There are radiator/wall cracks that still exist in the 1936 wing as well as windowsill decay. The roof is visibly in need of repair. There is an area of the roof in which the roof tiles are missing, and there is a plastic white Somerset banner in place to protect the section until the rain stops and maintenance can repair the area. As a result of the rain, puddles of water sit on the roof. The rubber roof over the cafeteria and gymnasium is damaged, allowing water to leak into both areas. Ceiling tiles in a boy's locker room are water-damaged and often are found on the floor after a storm. Moreover, students report that sometimes water drips upon them while eating in the cafeteria, and there also is flooding in the glass hallway by the courtyard. Most recently, students and staff members reported that frozen pipes burst in the 500 hallway causing extensive damage resulting in the closing of that section of the building while this area was repaired. Areas with limited space include the science labs, the art areas, and, sometimes, the gymnasium. The physical layout of the science labs is not conducive to 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching and learning. Once every four days, three teachers conduct a gym class without the use of one section of the gym that is closed because of water damage created by a leak in the roof. With the addition of the third gym class, the overall gym space is inadequate for 90 students, with the potential for a health and safety problem. Many of the systems in the facility are in poor working condition. Upon the accreditation team's arrival, the clocks and the bell system were inoperable because of a damaged transformer. Secretaries in the main office have to announce the beginning and end of each period. There are issues of uneven temperature throughout the building and a lack of needed ventilation. The HVAC system is maintained on a regular basis, but it is old. Custodian and faculty members note similar HVAC concerns in the art rooms, home economics room, and the kitchen. The art rooms are located in the basement of the building and do not have any operating windows to provide ventilation. Students report that after a kiln has been fired the previous evening, fumes from the firing of the pottery are still prevalent the following day. There is insufficient hot water in the kitchen and certain parts of the building and the sinks often clog in the home economics room. Faculty members state that the recent bursting of the pipes in the 500 hallway is additional evidence that the entire system is in need of major repair. The electrical system is not sufficient to support the school's mission to demonstrate technological literacy as a tool for learning, research, and communication. The power supply is frequently overloaded in certain parts of the building impeding the use of technology and equipment in the classrooms. In one of the computer labs, computers are connected to a string of power surge protectors that receive their electrical power from one electrical outlet on the floor. Although there is wireless connectivity in certain parts of the building, it is very intermittent. This has a

direct negative impact on instruction and learning. (*community resources committee, teachers, school leaders, maintenance personnel*)

Although the school and community report claims that "all building related problems are currently being addressed by the Somerset School Department," there are issues that have not been resolved dating back to at least the 2000 NEASC report and the feasibility study done in 2004. Both the Somerset and Berkeley districts submitted a prepared plan to build a new high school in 2007, but it was not approved. In response, the Massachusetts School Building Authority directed Somerset and Berkeley to investigate regionalizing. In May of 2010, the regional planning board will present results of their evaluation to members of the Berkeley and Somerset communities. The district approves expenditures of funds on the building only when there is an emergency and only after it receives voter approval at a special town meeting. For example, when the southeast wing had to be shut down due to structural damage from the deterioration of columns that offer support to the area, the town voted to allocate \$750,000.00 for emergency repairs. The lack of adequate space in certain instructional areas such as science and art hinders teaching and learning. The current condition of the facility negatively impacts teaching and learning by making it more of a challenge than it should be. Students do not learn best when they are not in a comfortable environment, if the furniture and equipment are not adequate to meet their educational needs, or if they are displaced by infrastructure problems. Moving students to different areas or trying unsuccessfully to get technology working has a direct negative impact upon teaching and learning. (*students, teachers, school leaders, observations*)

Safety is a concern in the building. This building does not comply with local, state, and federal guidelines or regulations because the site is not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Earlier documents from previous reports to The Commission on Public Secondary Schools indicate that the school officials are aware of the issues surrounding the lack of handicapped accessibility. Upon entering the school, there is a cement curb cut off to the right of the main entrance that prevents handicapped or automatic entry, and there are no automated doors in the building. There are two elevators in the building that are used for handicapped individuals, when necessary. One of these elevators located by the business department is not currently working. Only injured students, when necessary, use the other elevator, and they must obtain a key to use it. (*students, teachers, observations, community resources committee, school leaders, maintenance personnel*)

Local certifications for fire, health, and safety are posted in a glass case on the corner between the 300s corridor and the gym. These documents are on record with maintenance. The science labs do not have material safety data sheets posted in the classroom, but teachers report that they pull the appropriate sheet from their prepared binder of safety procedures at the start of each lab. There is no fire suppression system in the building with the exception of fire extinguishers located in areas throughout the building. Although, these are currently meeting code, according to the local fire department, this system would not meet up-to-date regulations in a new school. The teachers report that there is insufficient hot water in certain parts of the building causing concern regarding sanitation. Documentation from December 2005 shows that there are problems with some of the wiring in the 1936 building. In addition, these photos show ceiling damage in the 1936 wing and the presence of asbestos surrounding deteriorating pipes in

the crawl space of the building. School officials mailed a letter to parents in September 2008 to report that the asbestos has been contained and that the director of buildings and grounds would thoroughly inspect the areas in question twice a year. In the summer of 2009, some of this asbestos was removed, but not all. Poor ventilation is considered a safety issue in various parts of the school. In the art department, there is very little ventilation. For safety reasons, the art teacher uses the kiln to fire pottery at night, but students state they smell fumes in the morning. Ventilation is also a concern in the kitchen. In the warmer months, when cafeteria personnel prepare food in hot ovens, there are only two windows to provide any form of ventilation. There is also an area in the cafeteria's kitchen where there are leaks, and there is concern about the workers slipping while preparing lunch for students. Buckets are often placed on the floor to collect water that is dripping through the ceiling from the roof. *(teachers, maintenance personnel, school leadership team, community resources committee)*

While maintenance personnel and teachers work hard to ensure safety for students, there is an underlying uncertainty regarding the overall safety of the building. Lack of safety in an environment can lead to emergency situations and potential long-term health problems. Lack of ADA compliance makes it difficult for those who are handicapped or injured to get around the school. While there is a proposed long-range plan in place to address programs, staffing, facility needs, and capital improvements, and an upcoming vote in May 2010 by residents of Somerset and Berkeley with respect to regionalization, SHS and the Somerset School District lack a short-term plan to address those critical building issues that negatively impact the curricular and program issues that affect student learning. *(observations, teachers, self-study, maintenance, school leadership team, central office leadership team)*

Somerset High School provides and properly maintains, catalogues, and replaces equipment necessary to meet the instructional and facility needs of the school. A variety of areas, including the content areas, are responsible for maintenance and cataloging of equipment. Regular maintenance schedules and cataloging systems are in place for all furniture and equipment. Regular replacement schedules are in place for air filters, ventilation units, and roof fans. The plan/schedule is implemented and managed by the head of maintenance and the plans/schedules are on file. Replacement of broken furniture and the purchasing of new furniture is the responsibility of the school principal. Currently, there are no funds available for the replacement of furniture. Regular maintenance of the current facility is crucial for the continued use of the high school building in its current condition for teaching and learning as well as the afterschool programs and athletic activities. The timely repair and replacement of equipment and furniture would positively impact the ability for teachers to effectively deliver instruction and for students to learn on a daily basis. *(maintenance, school leadership team, department leaders, teachers, students)*

The building is maintained by two district maintenance personnel and four day and three night building custodians. The school has formal plans/schedules for the maintenance and cleaning of the facility, including the school grounds. There are general daily cleaning procedures in place, including sweeping floors, emptying trash cans, cleaning and disinfecting bathrooms and classrooms. The cleaning of the blackboards and whiteboards, general repairs of lighting fixtures and floor tiles, waxing of the floors and replacement of all ventilation filters on an as-needed or quarterly basis, are also part of a daily work schedule. In the art room, the filters

must be replaced every three weeks as a result of poor ventilation in the area. There are broken tiles on steps around the building that have not been repaired and are a safety concern. General landscaping and snow removal on walkways are completed by one groundskeeper who is supervised by the head custodian. Repair requests of classroom, common areas, and offices are submitted to the head of maintenance by school staff via a maintenance request form. Repairs are prioritized by safety need by the head of maintenance, and the high priority items are addressed in a timely manner. Although the building is generally maintained to provide a safe and secure environment as expressed in the school's mission statement, there are concerns related to the age of the facility. Certain classrooms in the building do not have windows, making for poor ventilation and difficulty with temperature control. Fewer than half of the students, staff members, and parents feel that the building is clean and well maintained. With the building in its current state, major renovations are needed. Because the town is currently exploring regionalization as part of a long-range plan to build a new school, no extensive renovations are being considered. The 2009-2012 school improvement plans do not address the current condition of the school building and the repairs and renovations necessary to ensure a safe and healthy environment for student learning. While routine maintenance is being performed by the custodians, both the short and long-term effects of a neglected facility are evident. The disrepair of the high school is a safety and health concern for both students and staff. *(maintenance personnel, facility tour, school leadership team, teachers, students)*

Somerset High School's record keeping is done primarily through the Modular Management System (MMS) student information software. MMS incorporates features such as registration and enrollment, student demographics and family units, daily school-wide attendance, master schedule, assessment reporting, grade point average (GPA), honor roll, course grades and report cards, report-producing program for state and district, discipline monitoring, parent Internet portal and mobile access. The 2009-2012 school improvement plan reveals there will be an increased use and accessibility of technology for teaching and learning and a method of communications among school, staff, and students and parents. However, individual classroom attendance reporting through MMS is hindered by the lack of classroom computers. Program needs are continually assessed by administrators, curriculum directors, parents, department heads, and staff members. Committees such as the school advisory committee (SAC) and the principal advisory committee (PAC) meet regularly to discuss current and future programs that have a positive effect on student learning and are in line with the school's mission statement. New courses and academic programs are also developed within the individual departments under the leadership of the content coordinator/department head. Staffing needs are determined by the master schedule and the financial status of the budget. The projected budget is level-funded for the 2010-2011 School Year. With the ongoing delay of addressing deficiencies with the building and its concurrent negative impact upon teaching and learning, a level-funded budget may have an adverse impact on the staffing for the next school year and may jeopardize the ability of the high school to better meet its mission and expectations for student learning in the Twenty-First Century. *(teachers, department leaders, school leadership team, central office leadership team)*

The 2009- 2013 Somerset Public Schools Capital Improvement Plan developed by the school department's business manager, with contributions from school committee members, building/grounds supervisor, school principals, various town officials, and the superintendent,

provides details of the capital projects likely to be necessary in the next five years. The issues include replacing the heating system return tank, roofs, heating system pipes and water lines in crawl spaces under the building, and fire alarm and smoke sensors around the building. The plan emphasizes that the district is planning to build a new high school, but these issues will likely require attention prior to completion of a major high school project. There is no specific plan to correct issues with regard to availability of power sources and the overtaxed water heater. Technology needs are addressed in the 2009- 2012 Somerset High School Technology Plan. These needs include the implementation of the MMS system, reducing the turnaround time for tech work orders, providing professional development opportunities for staff members, and work with the director of technology to ensure technology is available and ready to meet the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and Technology Standards of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). There are thirteen computer labs and three servers at the high school. Some of the computer labs are dedicated to business classes, but most are available for use by students and teachers through a sign-up process. There are areas throughout the building where Wi-Fi can be accessed. Regular teacher and student classrooms are not provided with computers for teacher or student use. Computers in regular classrooms are not available for teacher use, to check attendance, to conduct other administrative use, or to enhance the teaching and learning process. Every department has a workspace where two to three computers are available for teacher use. Many teachers bring their own laptops from home for classroom use. Most departments have a few laptops, Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projectors, or a SMARTBoard™ available for loan to teachers for instruction. One hindrance to technology in the classrooms is the lack of sufficient power outlets. When teachers have to decide what technology to use in a classroom because of the limited power supplies, instruction is compromised. Unfortunately, teachers should not have to make choices in methods of instruction, possibly hindering the teaching and learning environment. Clearly, the allocation of funds for computer technology within classrooms and other areas of the building is insufficient or unbalanced. Insufficient funding or inequitable allocation of funding for technology equipment maintenance and replacement adversely affect student learning in some educational programs for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education. *(school leadership team, teachers, students, self-study)*

Communication among parents, students, and staff members is critical to a student's education. Parents and students are often not provided with the most up-to-date grades so that they can address any educational issues as they arise. While SHS uses the computer MMS program, teachers still fill out a paper form to take daily attendance, which is then submitted to the attendance office. If teachers were able to use the attendance module that is part of the MMS software, the attendance office would know where students are at all times during the day. Because there is no desktop computer in each classroom, teachers are unable to access the MMS software to perform this period-by-period task. While there are LCD projectors, laptops, and SMARTBoards™ available for teacher use in classrooms, it is difficult to access them as there is a limited number of computer accessories that are located in the library media center and/or department areas. As well, limited power sources in each of the classrooms limit the use of computer technology. With the absence of computer technology in classrooms, teachers are bringing in personal laptops and projectors, and in some instances, technology is not used as an instructional tool within the context of the teaching and learning environment. Because of this limited technology, students are not exposed to a variety of instructional technology, which has a

negative impact upon their learning opportunities. *(school leadership team, self-study, department leaders, teachers, students, central office leadership team)*

The community and district's governing body struggle to provide adequate and dependable sources of revenue to maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, materials, and supplies for student learning. The district is not, however, addressing the major issues with respect to the infrastructure of the school building. In the school improvement plan, monies are allocated for replacing the heating system return tank, repairing roofs, heating system pipes, and water lines in crawl spaces under the building, and fire alarm and smoke sensors around the building. While the building is maintained in its current state, faculty and staff members express concern regarding permanent repairs to the building. In the past, emergency funds were allocated for areas of the school that were considered unsafe. There are no current plans to address safety problems such as the ventilation in the art room. When a school facility is in constant need of repair and disruption to classrooms, cafeteria, gym, art, and science rooms, an atmosphere of instability exists. Students and faculty members must have a safe, healthy and consistent environment where the facility promotes and enhances teaching and learning. It is clear that the long-term educational, health, and safety of students and staff members at SHS will only be rescued by a significantly enhanced physical environment. *(facility tour, department leaders, teachers, school leadership team)*

The development of the school budget begins in early October. This process initially involves teachers and content coordinators/departments leaders. Forty-three percent of the staff indicates that they have input in the budget process. However, interviews with teachers and content coordinators suggest that they are involved in the budget process. Through departmental discussions and student feedback, each department develops a comprehensive departmental budget that addresses the academic needs of the students. This includes additional textbook purchases made necessary by increased enrollment, updated versions of current textbooks, and new textbooks for new courses to be offered in the next school year. Additional items in the departmental budget include classroom supplies, lab supplies, and any new technology needs. Course enrollment data affects the development of budgetary needs. This process affords the teachers and department leaders the opportunity to impact students learning by developing programs and services that meet the needs of the students. Department leaders and teachers complete a budget description breakdown of costs form by course and by account number. This form requires a description of items, quantity, unit cost and total cost with a grand total on the bottom. Departments are required to provide additional documentation for all budget requests that exceed the prior year's appropriation by more than 5%. Additionally, requests for supplies, equipment, and textbooks for new courses must also include a written rationale. Once the departmental budget is completed, the budget forms are given to the principal for his comments, adjustments, and approval. The principal meets with the department leaders to discuss revisions to the submitted budget, if necessary. A master budget is created on an Excel spreadsheet by the principal's staff. The principal then presents the proposed budget to the school district business manager and superintendent for review. This process affords the department leaders, school leadership team, and teachers an opportunity for input for creative and innovative ideas to be considered at the decision level of the school. *(teachers, department leaders, school leadership team)*



**Commendations:**

1. The professional and financial support provided by the parent groups and local businesses
2. The opportunities for students to gain real world experience outside of the school environment
3. The willingness of teachers to purchase personal computers and multi-media technology resources for classroom use and to enhance student learning

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop and implement a plan to bring the facility into compliance with ADA standards and all applicable regulations
2. Develop a plan to provide teachers with classroom computers to enable them to effectively implement technology for both administrative use and for instruction
3. Fix corroded boiler valves
4. Replace roofs
5. Repair ceiling water damage
6. Install fire sprinklers throughout the building, including classrooms
7. Repair and replace the heating and ventilation systems to work properly and evenly
8. Update science labs
9. Repair or replace the current clock and bell system
10. Repair or replace step tiles throughout the building
11. Fully implement an online portal to inform parents of grades and homework/assignments status
12. Increase the number of power sources in classrooms
13. Address and resolve all facility issues that negatively impact teaching and learning within Somerset High School
14. Fund the necessary capital expenditures related to health and safety for the facility at the Somerset High School

## FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This comprehensive evaluation report reflects the findings of the school's self-study and those of the visiting committee. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administration, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in Somerset High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best interest of the students that the citizens of the district become aware of the strengths and limitations of the school and suggested recommendations for improvement, the Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes, which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Somerset High School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page fifty-eight. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The Commission urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the evaluation report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* which was given to the school at the onset of the self-study. Additional direction regarding suggested procedures and reporting requirements is provided at Follow-Up Seminars offered by Commission staff following the on-site visit.

The visiting team greatly appreciates the excellent hospitality demonstrated by the entire Somerset High School community. Its conscientious efforts in preparing the self-study and its openness and honesty in responding to the team's questions are a significant testament to the personnel at Somerset High School.

**New England Association of Schools and Colleges  
Somerset High School  
Somerset, Massachusetts  
Visiting Committee Directory  
March 14-17, 2010**

Stephen E. Mitchell, Chair  
Retired Principal  
Chepachet, RI 02814

Paul Mangelinkx, Assistant Chair  
Chatham High School  
Chatham, MA 02633

Eileen Belastock  
Franklin High School  
Franklin, MA 02038

Ruth Carrigan  
Whitman-Hanson Regional HS  
Whitman, MA 02382

Shelley Cohen  
Groton-Dunstable Regional HS  
Groton, MA 01450

Tammy D'Amato  
Grafton High School  
Grafton, MA 01519

Ann Kach  
Millbury High School  
Millbury, MA 01527

Thomas Lauder  
Leicester High School  
Leicester, MA 01524

Patrick Leighton  
Coventry High School  
Coventry, CT 06238

Suzanne Lynch  
Minnechaug Regional HS  
Wilbraham, MA 01095

Denise Martinelli  
Quabbin Regional HS  
Barre, MA 01005

Becky Mazur  
South Hadley High School  
South Hadley, MA 01075

JoAnn Pellecchia  
Mohawk-Trail Regional HS  
Shelburne Falls, MA 01370

Phillippe Simonini  
Woonsocket High School  
Woonsocket, RI 02895

John Staley  
Doherty Memorial High School  
Worcester, MA 01602

Serena Willis  
Monson High School  
Monson, MA 01057

# NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

## Commission on Public Secondary Schools

### SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has a *negative impact* on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact on the school's ability to meet the Standards. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes which must be reported:

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts, and student activities
- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
- significantly decreased funding
- cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
- cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- cuts in the number of support staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the educational media staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency
- identification by the state as an underperforming school
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees

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